

**Confidence and the choral singer: the
effects of choir configuration,
collaboration and communication**

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ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative study, based on a series of focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The research aims are: to explore the lived experience of choral singers; to identify some of the main influences on their perceptions of their voices and performance ability; to highlight some of the factors affecting their confidence as singers. Three focus group interviews, involving a total of eighteen singers, were carried out, followed by sixteen individual interviews. At the time of data collection, the majority of participants were involved in a range of different types of choral singing, and had experience of performing with a number of different conductors. The interviews each provided approximately two hours of recorded verbal data (over 40 hours in total), and have been analysed and interpreted using techniques based on interpretative phenomenological analysis. Emergent themes include situational and environmental factors, such as choral acoustics, choir configuration, and concert venues; the influence of significant others, including family, fellow singers, and conductors; and a number of issues related to choral direction, musical leadership and group dynamics. The ultimate aim of this research is to provide a set of useful recommendations for conductors and teachers with an interest in maximising confidence in choral ensembles.

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CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

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* See Appendix 11

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CoP: Community of practice. This refers to a communal environment in which social learning takes place (see Wenger 1998).

FG: Focus group interview.

HCL: ‘Human compatible learning’, as opposed to ‘human antagonistic learning’ (see Thurman and Welch, 2000).

IPA: Interpretative phenomenological analysis (see Smith 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

LTAS: Long term average spectrum.

MD: Musical director (often used synonymously with choral director or conductor).

MPA: Music performance anxiety, sometimes (in extreme cases) referred to as ‘stage fright’.

NVC: Non-verbal communication, including posture, gesture and facial expression.

S: Singer participating in individual interview.

SATB: Soprano; Alto; Tenor; Bass.

SMT: Self-managed team.

SOR: Self-to-other ratio. This refers to the balance, preferred by a choral singer, between the audio feedback of their own voice and the reference provided by the vocal output from other singers in the choir (see Ternström 1999)

SPL: Sound pressure level.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. A Personal Perspective

My preoccupation with the subject of confidence levels amongst singers arose from my work as a teacher, accompanist and conductor of both expert and non-expert singers, as well as from my early experience as a professional singer. In lessons and rehearsals, I have often found it necessary to spend almost as much time on confidence building as on vocal technique, interpretation and repertoire. Conversely, improvements in musical and vocal skills generally tend to improve confidence, as I have found that self-professed ‘non-singers’ and tentative novices often realise that, with training, they can learn to sing tunefully and develop a pleasant timbre.

During my career I have encountered numerous adult learners who (often erroneously) believed that they could not sing well, but for whom it frequently transpired that the root cause of this perception was related to a confidence issue of some kind. Anecdotal examples include primary school teachers who lacked the confidence to join in with their pupils in class singing; classical instrumentalists who dreaded the vocal sections of the aural tests in formal examinations; popular musicians who were unconfident in their ability to provide backing vocals; and accomplished dancers whose extreme avoidance of singing had jeopardised their chances of audition success.

This lack of confidence has not been limited to beginner singers, but has also been evident in some experienced amateur choral singers, who have obviously enjoyed singing but limited their participation to particular types of ensemble (perhaps favouring ‘non-auditioned’ or larger community choirs), rather than feeling confident

to explore other choral areas which attracted them. Other choral singers have enjoyed rehearsals but have been reluctant to take part in public performances. These informal observations piqued my interest in the role of confidence in amateur choral performance and set me on the path to my current research.

1.2. The Myth of the ‘Non-singer’

The principle that innate musicality and vocal ability are common facets of human nature is well established (Welch, 2000a, 2005). However, some singers doubt their own ability, and this can have a predictable effect on their confidence. Although it is generally agreed that ‘tone deafness’ or ‘perceived poor singing ability’ (Sloboda et al., 2005) is uncommon, affecting around 17% of people (Cuddy et al., 2005), it has been a pervasive concept in Western musical culture, with many adults claiming that they believe that they belong in this category (Richards and Durrant, 2003). After a comparative assessment of ‘tone-deaf’ singers and ‘non tone-deaf singers’, building on the procedures developed by Welch (1994), it was concluded that most self-diagnosed ‘non-singers’ are ‘not facing an insurmountable difficulty, but are likely to improve with targeted intervention’ (Wise and Sloboda, 2008: 3), such as providing musical training and choral experience. Even in the rare instances of ‘clinically diagnosed amusia’ (Ayotte et al., 2002; Peretz et al., 2003), vocal training has been proven to be effective in improving singing ability (Anderson et al., 2012; Tremblay-Champoux et al., 2013). Most authorities therefore support the suggestion that the ‘myth of tone deafness’ (Kazee, 1985) could be more constructively replaced with an interpretation based on underdeveloped skills, often attributable to lack of musical experience and appropriate learning opportunities (Welch, 2001).

Several reasons have been suggested for the negative beliefs of 'non-singers' regarding their vocal ability. The use of unsuitable repertoire, in terms of the pitch range in some classroom singing, may mean that children doubt their vocal ability because they are unable to sing all of the notes in many of the set songs and hymns (Welch, 1979). For some of the less confident adults considering choir membership, the effects of this may still be felt. Childhood criticism of vocal performance from influential adults can be a significant factor in loss of confidence in oneself as a potential singer, and those who subsequently adopt the identity of 'non-singer' often see this as irrevocable (Knight, 1999, 2011). This bipolar approach to singing ability, as either present or totally absent, rather than as part of a continuum of skill development (Welch, 1985, 1986), is endemic in some areas of formal education and has created a musical elitism in Western society (Richards and Durrant, 2003) which starkly contrasts with other parts of the world where singing is seen as completely inclusive (Welch and Murao 1994, cited in Richards and Durrant, 2003).

There is evidence that musical training can help to transform some self-proclaimed 'non-singers' into relatively competent singers, and that confidence is a strong factor in their perceptions of their own vocal performances (Wise and Sloboda, 2008). In some cases, suitable opportunities for ensemble singing, in a supportive environment, have converted lifelong 'non-singers' into enthusiastic participants in choral activities (Richards and Durrant, 2003). My own practical experiences of training amateur choirs and teaching individual singers led me to believe that the situation of the amateur choral singer who lacks confidence may have some parallels with the more extreme case of the self-professed 'non-singer'. I therefore initially speculated that some of the inhibiting factors affecting 'non-singers' might also contribute to

some of the reported confidence-related concerns amongst amateur singers, and concluded that this area is worthy of further investigation.

1.3. The Case of the Missing Amateur

Having scaled the cold white peaks of art [in order] to research experts,
it may be valuable now to descend and research novices in their
quaint nooks and cozy valleys. (Smith, 1997: 249)

Many amateur singers are by no means ‘novices’, having acquired a wide range of musical skills, knowledge and performance experience, and may therefore be classed as being committed to an amateur ‘career’ in music (Stebbins, 1996, 2004). However, they are, like the ‘non-expert’ musicians described by Smith (1997), largely absent from previous studies. Although the largest population of people involved in formal singing activities comprises the amateur performer (Pitts, 2005; Stebbins, 1996; Sundberg, 1987), there are very few written records of their experiences, feelings and perceptions of practice and performance. It is comparatively easy, however, to find autobiographies and biographies of professional soloists (Bostridge, 2011; Fleming, 2005; Tear, 1995) and conductors (Barenboim, 2003; Muti, 2011; Slatkin, 2012). In the current culture of honouring ‘celebrity’ there are also myriad interviews in the popular press with well-known conductors and solo performers in every genre, as well as similar examples in some of the professional journals (Freer, 2007; Miksza et al., 2010) and anthologies of musical reminiscences (Hines, 1982; Palmer, 2000; Wagar, 1991).

In contrast with the proliferation of literature on the relative minority of elite musicians, we very rarely hear about the experiences or perceptions of the amateur singers who swell the ranks of every local choral society, church choir, operatic society, community choir, male voice choir and amateur chamber choir throughout the nation.

Whilst amateur choral singers are ever-present in a wide variety of performance settings, and make a valuable contribution to our musical culture, they are simultaneously under-represented in the majority of musical and academic literature. For this reason, I decided to focus my current research on the world of these hitherto neglected stalwarts of our cultural life, and to use a qualitative, interview-based methodology that would allow us to 'hear' from the participants as directly as possible.

1.4. Anxiety and the Amateur Singer

The importance of carrying out new research which is designed to prioritise the experiential 'voice' of the adult amateur singer was highlighted for me during a review of the relevant work in the field of music performance anxiety (MPA), in which some of the sources and effects of 'stage fright' and performance 'nerves' are examined. The majority of these studies have concentrated on 'advanced' musicians (Papageorgi, Creech and Welch, 2013), such as professional instrumentalists (Abel and Larkin, 1990; Kenny et al., 2014), and tertiary-level music students (Hamann and Sobaje, 1983; Kenny et al., 2013). Where MPA amongst adult singers has been explored, the emphasis has tended to be on professional soloists (Spahn et al., 2010; Wilson, 2002). Where choral singers have been studied, participants have usually been drawn from professional or semi-professional ensembles (Kenny et al., 2004; Ryan and Andrews, 2009).

MPA is defined as 'the experience of persisting, distressful apprehension and/or actual impairment of performance skills in a public context, to a degree unwarranted given the individual's musical aptitude, training, and level of preparation' (Salmon, 1990: 3). Estimates of the prevalence of MPA amongst professional musicians

have varied, from 25-50% (Fishbein and Middlestadt, 1988, and Steptoe and Fidler 1987, cited in Abel and Larkin, 1990) to 75% (Salmon et al., 1989). Up to 79% of professional instrumentalists have reported that they 'sometimes experienced such intense anxiety before a performance that it impaired their playing' (Van Kemenade et al., 1995, cited in Steptoe, 2001: 293). In contrast with this, my previous research (Bonshor, 2002) established that, although mild performance anxiety was reported by adult amateur singers, very few participants had experienced the debilitating physiological and psychological symptoms of severe MPA described in studies of professional musicians and high-achieving music students (Abel and Larkin, 1990; Kenny, 2011; Salmon, 1990, 2001). However, my findings confirmed that more general confidence issues are a common concern for these amateur performers, with the result that enjoyment is often impaired, and participation in choral activities is sometimes limited to some extent. This is a pity, as the positive aspects of musical participation (Coffman, 2002; Pitts, 2005) and singing, especially as part of a choir or other vocal ensemble, have been well-documented (Clift and Hancox, 2001; Southcott, 2009). The current study has therefore been designed to provide a further exploration of the subject of confidence amongst adult amateur choral singers, by examining some of their relevant experiences as well as their perceptions of the rehearsal and performance process.

As the analytical core of my thesis is data-driven, the central chapters will largely be structured around the emergent themes generated by the participants. Each thematic chapter will therefore include its own introductory literature review, which will be specifically related to the individual themes as they are presented. Preparatory

to the presentation of the original research, however, there now follows a preliminary review of some of the general concepts which will underpin the thesis as a whole.

1.5. Definition of Terms

Within the context of social-cognitive psychology, confidence-related issues are often explored in terms of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). This is 'concerned with judgements of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations' (Bandura, 1982: 122). In relation to my research, the following definition of perceived self-efficacy seems particularly appropriate to some of the challenges of learning complex choral works and participating in public performances as part of a choral ensemble:

The belief in one's competence to tackle difficult or novel tasks and to cope with adversity in specific demanding situations. (Luszczynska, et al., 2005: 81)

The above definitions of the theoretical concept of self-efficacy have parallels with dictionary definitions of confidence, such as a 'belief in one's own abilities' (Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2000) or 'a feeling of self-assurance arising from an appreciation of one's own abilities or qualities' (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2003). Due to the parallels between this more widespread, largely implicit, general understanding of 'confidence' and the psychological concept of 'self-efficacy', these terms will be used interchangeably in this thesis, with self-efficacy functioning as the technical description of the commonly understood concept of self-confidence (Vealey et al., 1998).

1.6. Features of Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is predictive, as it affects whether or not specific behaviours will be enacted and how much will be invested in any particular activity:

Expectations of personal efficacy determine whether coping behavior will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long it will be sustained in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences. (Bandura, 1977: 191)

An individual's judgement of their own self-efficacy has a strong influence on the behaviours they choose to avoid or initiate, and misjudgements have far-reaching effects on their performance. People who vastly overestimate their own ability may set goals that are beyond their capabilities, which can result in unnecessary emotional turmoil and failure. Conversely, individuals who underestimate their capacity also pay a price, in terms of self-limitation, as they tend to avoid situations and activities that would potentially allow them to develop their skills and increase their competence (Bandura, 1980).

Self-efficacy is malleable and subject to change (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003), which means that it should be possible for efficacy perceptions to be the focus of a programme of perceptual adjustment, which may have constructive, therapeutic effects. Bandura (1977) proposed three main strategies for changing self-efficacy perceptions: participant modelling (direct personal experience); vicarious experience (modelling by others); exhortative approaches (verbal persuasion). Participant modelling is the most effective method of altering self-efficacy, whilst the effectiveness of modelling by others is increased if the models are similar to the observer. Verbal persuasion or encouragement depends upon the individual's perception of the person delivering the encouragement:

The impact of verbal persuasion on self-efficacy may vary substantially depending on the perceived credibility of the persuaders, their prestige, trustworthiness, expertise, and assuredness. The more believable the source of the information, the more likely are efficacy expectations to change. (p. 202)

There is also a physiological component of self-efficacy, as individuals partly derive judgements of their capabilities from subjective interpretations of their physiological state (Bandura, 1982). High emotional and physiological arousal can occur in stressful or challenging situations, and involve aversive somatic symptoms, such as raised heartbeat and increased respiration rates, which can have an impact on performance, and upon expectations:

Because high arousal usually debilitates performance, individuals are more likely to expect success when they are not beset by aversive arousal than if they are tense and viscerally agitated (p. 127)

The impact of arousal partly depends upon the attribution of the symptoms:

People who perceive their arousal as stemming from personal inadequacies are more likely to lower their efficacy expectations than those who attribute their arousal to certain situational factors. (Bandura, 1977: 202)

Individuals who are particularly vulnerable to anxiety arousal may become so preoccupied with their somatic symptoms, and the fact that they perceive these as a sign of their personal inadequacy, that they are distracted from the challenges of the task, and therefore their performance quality suffers (Sarason 1976, cited in Bandura, 1977: 202). Positive experiences of successful performance, or 'mastery experiences' (Bandura, 1977), can counteract these negative effects of high arousal. They also increase the likelihood of initiating the relevant behaviour, and of increasing self-efficacy in this area, so that more effort is invested. More improvements then occur

due to increased effort, perseverance and experience, creating an upward spiral of task mastery, self-efficacy, effort and successful performance: 'Mastery expectations influence performance and are, in turn, altered by the cumulative effects of one's efforts' (p. 194). Efficacy expectations also vary in terms of magnitude (according to the level of difficulty); generality (whether or not the mastery is limited to a particular situation or extends beyond it); and the strength of the expectations:

Weak expectations are easily extinguishable by disconfirming experiences, whereas individuals who possess strong expectations of mastery will persevere in their coping efforts despite disconfirming experiences. (p. 194).

This interrelationship between perceived self-efficacy, effort, performance quality, and mastery experiences plays a pivotal role in the development of personal efficacy:

Successes raise mastery expectations; repeated failures lower them, particularly if the mishaps occur early in the course of events. After strong efficacy expectations are developed through repeated success, the negative impact of occasional failures is likely to be reduced. (p. 199)

A distinction has been made between 'hopes for successful outcomes rather than [a] sense of personal mastery' (p. 194). Outcome expectancies (the expectation that certain behaviours lead to specific outcomes) are also differentiated from efficacy expectations (the belief that one is capable of carrying out the behaviour required to achieve the outcome). Self-efficacy is paramount in relation to motivation, as no reward will operate as an incentive to learn or perform if the individual does not have faith in his or her own ability (Bandura, 1977). Possessing the requisite skills also plays an important role, as no amount of self-efficacy will facilitate an effective performance if the necessary skills are lacking (Schunk, 1989). The complex

interaction between self-efficacy, expectations, skill, incentive and motivation has been summarised as follows:

Given appropriate skills and adequate incentives [...] efficacy expectations are a major determinant of people's choice of activities, how much effort they will expend, and of how long they will sustain effort in dealing with stressful situations. (Bandura, 1977: 194)

When attempting to improve self-efficacy perceptions, the factors affecting the levels and strength of efficacy expectations are an important consideration. However, attempting to identify causality is not straightforward due to the complexity of the interrelated psychological, biological and behavioural processes:

The issue is one of whether feeling good about oneself is primarily responsible for increased achievement or whether successful performance is largely responsible for stronger feelings of self-worth. Because of the reciprocal nature of human motivation and behavior, it is unlikely that such a question can be resolved. (Pajares, 1996: 56)

1.7. Self-efficacy in Music

Self-efficacy theory has been applied to many areas of research, including academic achievement (Ames and Archer, 1988; Greene and Miller, 1996; Pajares, 1996); mathematical ability (Pajares and Miller, 1994); and sport psychology (Bruton et al., 2013; Hays et al., 2009). There are also a limited number of studies related to musical achievement. For example, Craske and Craig (1984) compared Bandura's self-efficacy theory with Lang's three systems model of performance anxiety (cited in Craske and Craig, 1984: 267). It was found that, in a high demand performance situation (with an evaluative audience), anxious performers experienced a synchronous response across all three systems, with physiological, behavioural and affective symptoms of musical performance anxiety. In the same situation, non-anxious performers only experienced

physiological responses, whilst all other systems coped well. In studies of attainment in music performance examinations, it has been established that self-efficacy is associated with high achievement in the same way as in other academic spheres (McPherson and McCormick, 2006), and that perceived efficacy is often 'the best predictor of actual performance' (McCormick and McPherson, 2003: 37). However, there is a difference between practical music exams and academic performance:

In a highly charged music performance examination, the performer only has one opportunity to perform at his or her best. There is no time to return and revise an earlier decision, or to make more time available for one sub-task by quickly dispatching another. (p. 48)

The presence of the examiner in practical music exams is also likely to add to the pressure of the situation, especially for self-conscious performers, who are acutely aware of the potential for criticism. In other performance situations, the presence of the audience can have a similar effect (Craske and Craig, 1984). More recent studies have compared conservatoire and university students' self-efficacy for learning, and for performing (Ritchie and Williamon, 2011a), and primary children's self-efficacy for music learning (Ritchie and Williamon, 2011b), but research applying this concept to adult singers appears to be limited. In Sichivitska's (2003) study of college choir members and their motivation to persist in music, it was found that parental support, an encouraging conductor, and prior experience of musical performance helped to develop a more positive musical self-concept, which in turn was a motivating factor. However, this study seems to focus on general musical self-concept as a domain-specific sense of competence rather than self-efficacy for singing as a task-specific perception of ability. Although self concept and self-efficacy are both predictive of motivation, emotion and performance, self-concept is based on normative

comparisons whilst self-efficacy is built upon individual, goal referenced judgements based on one's own performance. Furthermore, self-concept is relatively stable, whereas self-efficacy is a more malleable attribute (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003). In another study of vocal and instrumental students in tertiary education, self-efficacy was found to be a significant factor in effective practice, and it was suggested that, since self-efficacy is subject to change, teachers should nurture self-belief, rather than simply training students in the requisite musical skills (Nielsen, 2004).

1.8. Group Efficacy

Self-efficacy has, so far, been discussed in individual terms, but a sense of group efficacy can develop in organizational settings:

Confidence is both a personal and a social construct...collective systems such as classrooms, teams of teachers, schools, and even school districts develop a sense of collective efficacy. (Pajares, 1996: 567)

Collective efficacy is a perception that 'resides in the minds of group members as the belief they have in common regarding their group's capability' (Bandura, 2006: 165). This has a profound effect on the group as a whole, as well as upon individual members:

Perceived collective efficacy fosters groups' motivational commitment to their missions, resilience to adversity, and performance accomplishments. (Bandura, 2000: 75)

In the sphere of sports performance, beliefs in team capabilities can influence goal setting, performance standards and motivation (Bray, 2004; Chow and Feltz, 2008; Greenlees et al., 2000). Collective efficacy also has an impact on the affective

reactions of team members, including a reduction in pre-performance anxiety in teams with high levels of perceived group efficacy (Greenlees et al., 1999). High collective efficacy also contributes to enhanced levels of collaboration and cohesion, which is 'characterised by cooperativeness, helpfulness and sharing' (Bandura, 2000: 77), whilst low group efficacy can become a serious impediment to the functioning of the group:

A collective system with members plagued by self-doubts about their capabilities to perform their roles will achieve little. (p. 77)

In a similar process to that by which the collective performance of a group can transcend individual efforts, due to 'interactive, co-ordinative and synergistic dynamics' (Stajkovic and Lutherns, 1998), group efficacy is a phenomenon which is 'not simply the sum of the efficacy beliefs of individual members. Rather, it is an 'emergent group level property' (Bandura, 2000: 76). Group and personal efficacy are reciprocally related due to the social and interdependent nature of the collective endeavour:

Individuals' judgments of their personal efficacy are not detached from the other members' enabling or impeding activities...a judgment of individual efficacy inevitably embodies the coordinative and interactive group dynamics. Conversely, in judging the efficacy of their team, members certainly consider how well key team mates can execute their roles. (p.76)

Despite these emergent and interactional aspects of group efficacy, collective and personal efficacy beliefs have similar functions, with common sources and consequences, and are subject to the same processes (Bandura, 1997, cited in Chow and Feltz, 2008). In common with perceptions of personal efficacy, shared beliefs in collective efficacy can affect goal setting, effort, persistence in the face of opposition or obstacles, and susceptibility to discouragement (Bandura, 2000). Shared efficacy beliefs, like personal efficacy beliefs, also have a degree of malleability, which is

subject to the influence of personal mastery experiences, peer modelling, credible verbal encouragement, and the interpretation of physiological and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977).

1.9. Choral Confidence

Although my current research is based on individual, subjective perceptions of personal efficacy (or confidence), collective efficacy is an important concept relative to the complexity of group music making, with its combination of musical and social challenges. The choir functions as a unit, at the same time as being a collection of individuals, each with their own personal needs and contributions. The proficiency and confidence levels of other members, along with the individual's evaluation of his or her own skills and confidence, are therefore likely to have a reciprocal effect on each other. With this in mind, this study will consider the impact of the collective self-efficacy of choirs upon their individual members, as well as exploring how group efficacy for choral singing might be developed and maximized.

Previous researchers have commented on the relative lack of application of self-efficacy theory to musical performance:

Given the enormous body of evidence showing the power of self-efficacy's influence on academic achievement, it is surprising how few studies have applied this theoretical framework in music, an area of learning that places great physical, mental and emotional demands on musicians. (McPherson and McCormick, 2006: 332)

Similarly, very little research has examined the collective aspects of self-efficacy in the context of amateur choral performance. As with previous research into MPA and musical self-efficacy, the limited amount of previous work in this area has tended to

focus on group efficacy amongst music students (Hendricks, 2014). The relative dearth of research relating to adult amateur singers seems inconsistent with both the level of engagement in amateur choral activity, and with the burgeoning research emphasizing the benefits of participation.

The benefits of choral singing include physiological improvements (Beck et al., 2000; Kreutz et al., 2004); enhanced general health and well-being (Mellor, 2013); psychological well-being and mood enhancement (Clift and Hancox, 2010; Judd and Pooley, 2014; Unwin et al., 2002); and social cohesion (Faulkner and Davidson, 2006; Parker, 2010). Ensemble singing also has therapeutic applications for adults with physical or mental health problems (Dingle et al., 2013; Eades and O'Connor, 2008) and reduces isolation, particularly for socially disadvantaged groups (Bailey and Davidson, 2002, 2005) and elderly people (Creech et al., 2013).

1.10. Research Aims

Bearing in mind all of the above potential benefits of ensemble singing, examining the subject of confidence from the perspective of the adult amateur choral singer is likely to pay dividends in terms of social capital (Ruud 2013), particularly if undertaken with a view to developing possible strategies to enable less confident singers to participate to their full potential so that they might reap the full rewards of choral activity. The current study was therefore devised with the following research aims:

- To explore the lived experience of amateur choral singers in relation to confidence;
- To identify some of the main influences on singers' perceptions of their vocal ability;

- To highlight some of the factors affecting singers' confidence in their performance ability;
- To extrapolate strategies designed to manage confidence issues amongst amateur choral singers.

1.11. Thesis Structure

The next chapter will outline the methodology, research design and data collection methods employed in this study. The following four chapters will then report the findings of the research, which will be structured according to the themes emerging from the data. The main superordinate themes discussed in the analytical chapters can be briefly summarized as follows:

- Non-verbal communication, including the physical presentation of confidence in performance;
- Situational and environmental factors, with particular reference to choir configuration and its relationship with performance venues and acoustics;
- The role of collaborative learning and the development of choral communities;
- Verbal communication, including the content, amount, style, source and delivery of feedback.

These data-driven sections will finally be followed by a set of conclusions and recommendations, presented in relation to the superordinate themes. The recommendations will generally be directed towards choral conductors rather than aimed at individual choral singers, due to the nature of the emergent themes.

2. METHOD

2.1. Methodology

Singing is largely a subjective action. (Miller, 1996: 3)

Due to the personal nature of the voice as an individual, embodied instrument (Thurman and Welch, 2000), and the inherently subjective nature of self-reported confidence levels in singers, it was decided that a qualitative, phenomenological approach to this study would be the most appropriate means of providing 'a focus on understanding the meaning events have for persons being studied' (Patton, 1991). A phenomenological method, based on in-depth interviews with open-ended questions, was therefore adopted in order to explore the lived experience of the participants (Smith et al., 2009), and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) techniques were applied to the data (Smith, 2004; Smith and Osborn, 2003). The initial intention was to obtain what might be described as a 'vocal confidence life history', with particular reference to choral singing, in order to map the experiences that the participants interpreted as relevant to their confidence levels. The model of life history research as 'a flowing narrative, completely in the words of the person telling the story' (Atkinson, 1998: 3) reflects some of the aims of this study.

A life history approach to data collection seemed particularly appropriate to my research, as anecdotal evidence garnered throughout a lengthy teaching career was one of the motivational factors for the study. During many lessons, adult vocal students have often been eager to tell their stories, especially when issues of confidence arose. It was therefore felt that this would be a useful way of accessing the subjective experiences and perceptions which would provide the centrepiece of this

study. It was also recognised that the narrative process itself might add to the participants' insight into their particular confidence issues, providing further illumination for both the singer and the researcher:

When we tell a story from our own life [...] we increase our working knowledge of ourselves because we deliver deeper meaning in our lives through the process of reflecting and putting the events, experiences and feelings into oral expression. (Atkinson, 1998: 1)

An emergent approach to this research was selected to reflect a number of emergent features of the experience of singers. Firstly, they experience the voice as an 'emergent' instrument, as its potential emerges while it is being trained, as well as being developed through maturational processes and regular use. Their instrument grows with them during adolescence and childhood, and changes, develops (and sometimes deteriorates unexpectedly) at various stages during the singer's lifespan. It is also subject, on a daily basis, to external influences, such as the dryness or humidity of the environment, as well as being affected by the singer's health, emotional state, and diet. Secondly, the confidence levels of a performer may also be subject to change throughout their lifespan, partly depending upon personal circumstances, life experiences and situational factors. Thirdly, as a voice teacher and choir trainer, I am accustomed to working in what I regard as an 'emergent' way with singers and their voices, responding to vocal and musical developments during the process of training individual singers and choral ensembles. All of these factors combined to reinforce the appropriateness of adopting an emergent, inductive stance when exploring this subject. A qualitative, phenomenological approach to this area of musical performance is particularly appropriate, as choral activities are concerned with the dynamic interaction between the conductor, singers and audience, and are unavoidably

affected by the subjective experiences and perceptions that all of the participants bring to this activity:

Let us research these questions qualitatively. We are dealing with people interacting with people and creating an artistic human phenomenon: music. (Durrant, 2003: 82)

2.2. Research Design

My research design is predominantly centred around a series of detailed, individual interviews. A semi-structured format was favoured, so that the interviewee could be treated as the 'expert on the subject' and given 'the maximum opportunity to tell his or her story' (Smith, 1995: 12). This allowed for a relatively collaborative process, as each participant was able to share in determining the direction of the interview, and to introduce subjects and themes that may not have been anticipated in advance of the research process.

It was decided that a preliminary set of focus groups would provide a useful additional form of data collection. Pairing focus groups with individual interviews is seen as a propitious combination 'when the goal is to generate theories or explanations' (Morgan and Krueger, 1993: 9), and when the research aim is 'to understand the issue or topic from the everyday knowledge and perception of specific respondent subgroups' (Vaughn et al., 1996: 25). Previous successful examples of focus group research in the performing arts include studies of audience experience (Radbourne et al., 2009), and an exploration of collaboration and competition in the context of a male choral ensemble (Faulkner and Davidson, 2006), and these provided useful models for this study.

Focus groups were an attractive supplement to the planned individual interviews for practical reasons, as they facilitate the efficient collection of data from a relatively large number of participants (Wilkinson, 2004). They also generate more information through the mechanics of the group interaction, by means of creating a 'chain reaction' of further responses from the group (Vaughn et al., 1996); by stimulating recall and opinion elaboration (Frey and Fontana, 1991); by provoking accounts of similar and contrasting experiences (Goodson and Sikes, 2001); and, most appealingly of all in the context of this research topic, may 'spark new insights or help them to develop their ideas more clearly' (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994: 104). A further advantage is the fact that the group situation dilutes the interviewer's influence on the individual interviewees and on the interview process, and has a positive impact on the internal validity of the research (Frey and Fontana, 1991; Madriz, 2000).

Potential disadvantages of the focus group include the risk of group compliance, a complicating factor in addition to the usual hazards of 'demand characteristics' in relation to the researcher; the possible tendency for identification with other participants based on interpersonal attraction or the need for a sense of solidarity; 'groupthink', a phenomenon also derived from a desire for cohesion; and the 'sequencing effect' whereby later opinions tend to be similar to the earlier responses (Albrecht et al., 1993). These possible tendencies towards conformity can be counteracted in a number of ways, including reminders from the group moderator that a range of different experiences, perceptions and feelings are sought, and taking practical steps to ensure that the sessions remain as inclusive as possible (Morgan and Krueger, 1993).

Some reservations have previously been expressed regarding the use of focus groups in IPA projects, on the basis that this analytical technique was developed with the specific aim of exploring personal experience at a detailed level, whilst the data obtained from focus groups often prioritise the discourses present in the group and are complicated by issues of group dynamics (Smith, 2004). However, IPA analysis can be effective for group interviews, if the sessions are relaxed enough to be conducive to open discussions between the participants. Due to the more 'naturalistic' setting of a group discussion, 'the group context may actually facilitate personal disclosures' (Wilkinson, 2004: 180) and interactions between participants (including challenges and disagreements, as well as finding areas of common ground) can 'generate elaborated accounts' (p. 181). The extent to which participants feel able to share their feelings, perceptions and experiences depends upon the interaction between various factors, including the topic under discussion, the facilitation of the session, and the personal characteristics of the interviewees (Smith, 2004). When selecting the participants for the focus groups in my study, the composition of each group was intended to allow the interviewees to feel relaxed enough to share 'their own personal experiences in sufficient detail and intimacy, despite the presence of the group' (p. 51).

2.3. Participants

Sampling for the focus groups and the individual interviews was purposive rather than random, as it was necessary to access participants with sufficient experience of choral singing to have developed some relevant perceptions and feelings about the subject being investigated. This was particularly important for the focus groups, as 'a randomly sampled group is unlikely to hold a shared perspective on the research topic and may not even be able to generate meaningful discussions' (Morgan, 1997: 35). Group

homogeneity was also considered, as it was felt that this might encourage more disclosure than heterogeneously constituted groups since it is 'easier for participants sharing similar key characteristics to identify with each other's past experiences' (Knodel, 1993: 40). For this reason, the focus groups were organised according to gender and experience, with the first group consisting of female singers with extensive choral experience, and the second group comprising less experienced female singers, whilst the third was a group of experienced male singers. In practice, however, although the gender division was maintained, the level of experience in each group was more varied than originally intended, as some of the less experienced performers destined for the second group were only available to attend the first session.

Purposive sampling ensured that all thirty-four participants had experience of a range of different types of choral singing (Figure 1), including church choirs, choral societies, chamber choirs and operatic societies. The majority also had experience of performing with several different conductors; over half of the participants in the individual interviews had sung with more than ten choral conductors (Figure 2).

Figure 1.

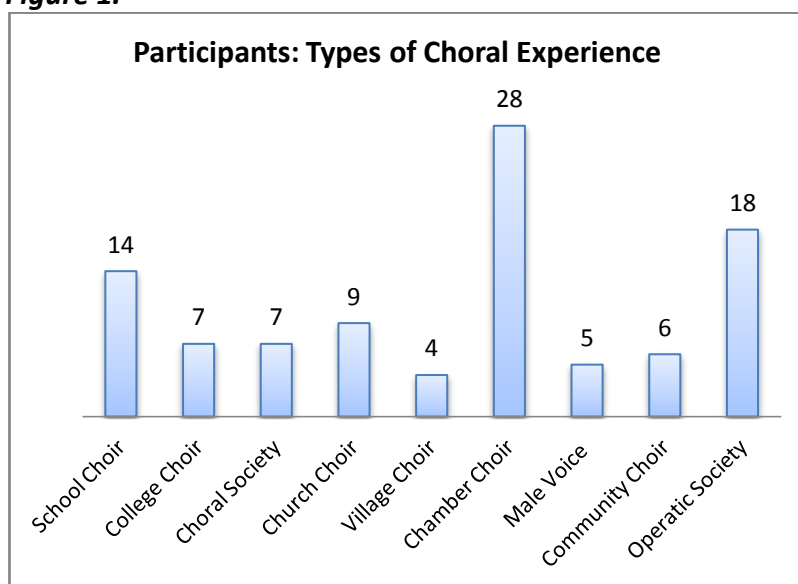
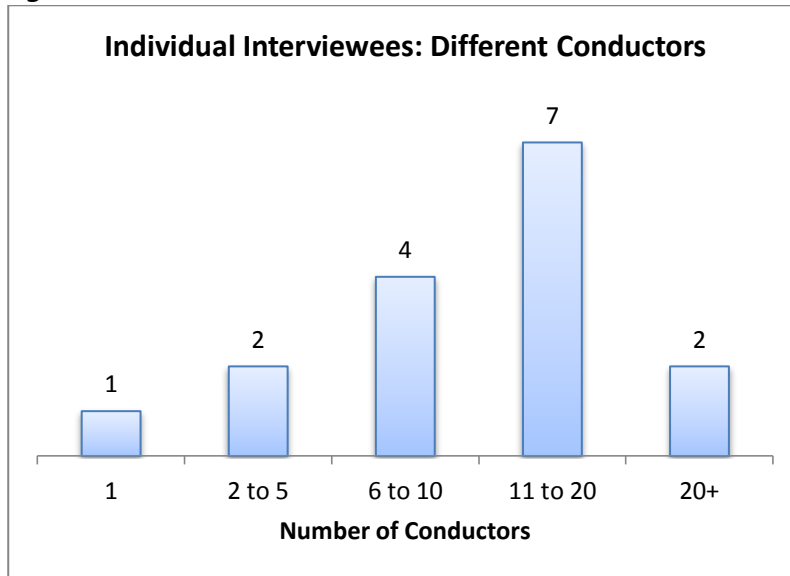


Figure 2.



Most of the participants had many years of experience of singing in choral ensembles (Figure 3), which is reflected by the age range of the singers involved in this study (Figure 4). The majority of interviewees had over 5 years of choral experience, and twenty-three participants had over 15 years' experience. Between them, the singers interviewed in this study had over eight hundred years of choral singing experience.

Figure 3.

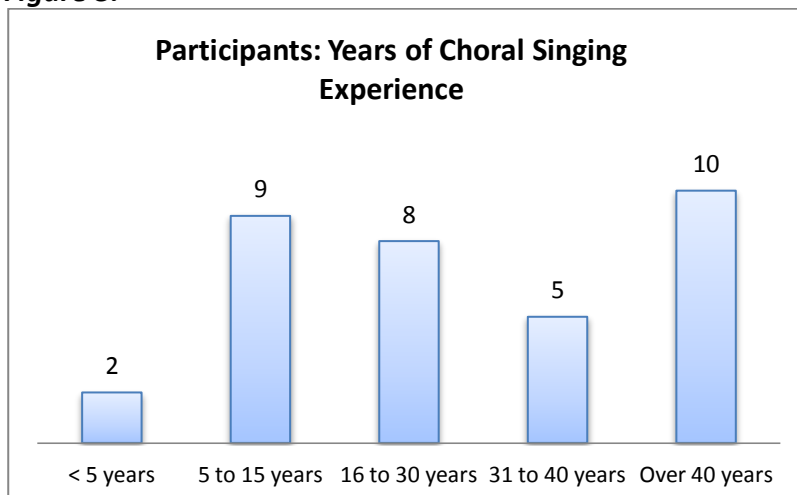
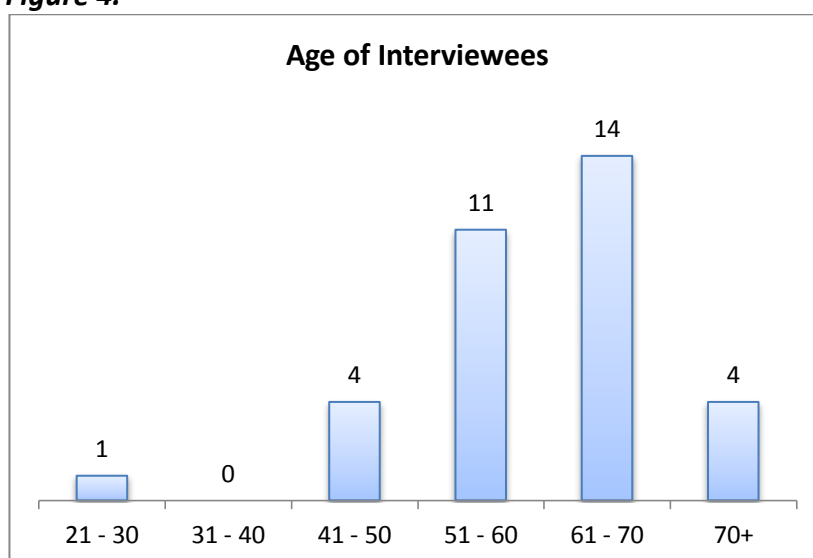


Figure 4.



Geographically, the participants' experience was similarly broad, with many of the singers being well travelled and having experience of performing with choirs in several locations. The combined experience of participants included singing with choral ensembles in Wales, Cornwall, Devon, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Surrey and Hampshire. It is notable, however, that despite their keen interest in choral singing, and their vast practical experience, only two of the thirty-four participants had continued with their musical education beyond secondary school, and most reported receiving very little formal musical training during their school years.

Initially, there was an element of 'convenience' sampling (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), since the focus group participants were all members of chamber choirs that I have conducted. This was partly to ensure an element of relaxation, in order to facilitate a relatively open discussion. The first eight individual interviewees had also sung under my direction at some stage. The majority of the focus group participants and all of these individual interviewees also sing with (or have sung with) other choral

ensembles and conductors. A further eight participants were sourced from local choral groups, with the aim of interviewing a set of singers who were entirely unknown to me. This was in order to ascertain whether or not familiarity with me, and with my way of running rehearsals etc, made any difference to the responses to any of the questions, or to the comprehensiveness of the responses.

It had originally proven to be difficult to find participants from other choral ensembles. No doubt this was partly due to the investment of time and effort required for the two-hour in-depth interviews. Amongst the singers already known to me there was presumably an element of goodwill, and therefore a willingness to engage in the study. This factor would have been absent amongst singers unknown to me. This, along with the possibility of some suspicion about the motives of an unfamiliar researcher, meant that initial attempts to recruit directly from local choral societies and community choirs were not particularly successful. For this reason, a 'snowballing' approach (Goodson and Sikes, 2001) to sampling was taken. Vocal students and choir members who have worked with me introduced me to singers from other choirs with which they perform. This resulted in eight further interviews with singers who were previously unfamiliar to me, and who had experience of performing with a wide variety of vocal ensembles and different choral directors.

2.4. Data Collection

Three focus group interviews, involving eighteen singers in total, were completed, followed by sixteen individual interviews. Following approval of this research through the University of Sheffield's ethics review process, all interviewees and focus group participants completed a consent form (see Appendices 3 and 4), after reading the

research information sheets (see Appendices 2 and 3). In this way, voluntary informed consent was obtained from each participant. Information was also provided regarding the intended uses of the data, along with an explanation of the protocols for ensuring confidentiality and anonymity.

Participants also completed an initial questionnaire which collected background information on age, gender, musical education and training, singing experience and choral activities (see Appendices 6 and 7). Following the focus groups, an additional question was added to the background questionnaire for individual interviews, regarding the number of choral conductors with whom each participant had sung. Each interview was recorded using a digital recorder, and backed up with a cassette tape recording. During the focus groups, an assistant took notes, so that any overlapping dialogue that was difficult to distinguish on the recording could be clarified later. The assistant also noted seating positions, and any non-verbal behaviour which would not be apparent on the audio recording.

The focus groups each commenced with an 'ice-breaker' exercise, consisting of simple questions about why they sing, and the perceived benefits of choral participation (see Appendix 8). Time was allowed for a written response to this part of the interview, and the participants were invited to work on this in pairs or groups of three. The written element of this preparatory exercise was designed to instil confidence in speaking to the group and to encourage independence, as 'there is something about writing things down that reinforces a person's commitment to contributing these thoughts to the group' (Morgan, 1997: 50). Once the subgroups had fed their responses back to the group as a whole, each participant introduced themselves to the group with a brief summary of their experience as a choral singer.

The rest of the interview was conducted with the guidance of a semi-structured schedule, consisting of open-ended questions (see Appendix 9).

The focus group format had been selected partly because group respondents can be 'more forthcoming with the stimulus or safety of a group of fellow respondents' (McCracken, 1988: 28). Bearing in mind the personal and potentially sensitive nature of the subject of confidence, it had been unclear whether the groups in this case would foster increased candour or result in more inhibited responses. The participants in each of the three singers' focus groups shared the experience of being in chamber choirs which I had conducted for several years. This meant that they were known to each other, and also familiar with me, in my professional capacity. The singers involved are accustomed to working together in a relaxed rehearsal setting, and also have some social interaction outside rehearsals, so it was felt that they had sufficient familiarity with each other to facilitate relevant personal disclosure. The idea that the members of focus groups should be strangers to each other would not necessarily have been helpful in this setting, and has been seen by some previous researchers as impractical (Morgan and Krueger, 1993).

The decision to select singers who regularly rehearse and perform together was justified, as the group discussions flowed smoothly and there was a high level of input from all participants. Each of the focus groups in this study was a hub of lively debate with, in some cases, some surprisingly intimate revelations. In Focus Group 1, there was immediately an air of excitement as the participants arrived, and there was an animated discussion during the 'ice-breaker' exercise. A well-balanced group conversation took place around the questions on the interview schedule, and some interesting and informative diversions from the schedule also occurred. In Focus Group

2, which was a third of the size of the first group, the conversation was still lively, and there was a very positive, supportive atmosphere. There was a tendency for the most confident member of this group to dominate the conversation, but the other members were given frequent opportunities to contribute and responded fully to each of the questions. In Focus Group 3 (the only male group convened) the atmosphere was also very relaxed, but there tended to be a series of consecutive mini-monologues rather than a group discussion. Compared with the other groups, there were fewer indicators of whether the participants were in agreement or not. There were fewer interruptions or supportive comments, and fewer times when more than one person spoke at once. However, concentration was intense, with everyone listening carefully to the speakers and responding in a respectful and measured way. There was also a high level of agreement expressed in relation to some of the recurrent themes.

Some of the potential problems of group interviews (Albrecht et al., 1993) were anticipated, and pre-emptive strategies (Morgan and Krueger, 1993) were employed during the sessions. During the focus groups, I ensured that the participants understood that there were no particular expectations and no 'right answers'. I explained that all viewpoints would be welcome and that I perceived the group interview as an exploratory process, with the participants as the experts on their own experiences (Smith, 1995). Each participant was given an opportunity to speak on each topic, and interactions between participants were allowed to develop. During the course of the focus groups in the current study, a number of unexpected themes and significant issues emerged, which then partially informed the design of the schedules for the individual singers' interviews (see Appendix 10). As well as being valuable in providing an initial range of themes, the focus groups were also a useful 'sensitising

tool' (Faraday and Plummer, 1979; Plummer, 2001), as they generated concepts that primed me for awareness of some of the key issues which might otherwise have been neglected in the later interviews.

All of the semi-structured interviews were conducted in the spirit of the emergent style of the research project. An interview schedule was used, with a series of open-ended questions, along with a set of subheadings containing prompts for me to use, should the interviewee seem to need clarification of the main question. In practice, these prompts were very rarely used, as all of the interviewees were very forthcoming about their experiences and perceptions. All of the principal, planned questions were covered during each interview. However, the interview process was relatively relaxed, allowing participants to make connections fairly freely, and to digress from the schedule at times. Interviewees often arrived at topics related to some of the scheduled questions before they actually arose, which provided an indication of the significance of a particular area from the participant's perspective. Permitting the participants to shape the interview to some extent, and sometimes changing the order of questions to reflect their input, allowed for the possibility that the interview may 'enter an area that had not been predicted by the investigator but which is extremely pertinent to, and enlightening of, the project's overall question' (Smith, 1995: 17). This flexible approach to the interview schedule was in keeping with the 'relatively unstructured, informal, conversation-type encounters' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001: 28) recommended for life history research.

A detailed research journal was maintained throughout the data collection stage, and comprehensive field notes were made immediately after each focus group and interview (Krueger, 1993). Member checks (see Appendix

11) were also completed in order to verify that my interpretations of the interviews were accurate (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994) as far as the participants were concerned. The focus groups and individual interviews each provided approximately two hours of recorded verbal data (over 40 hours in total), which I then transcribed (see Appendices 13 and 14 for transcription examples). The data was then entered into a custom-made database, which was designed to evolve in order to accommodate the emergent themes.

2.5. Reflections on the Interview Process

There were no obvious differences in the contribution of the participants in the individual interviews who were not familiar with me, compared with those who already knew me. For this reason it was decided that, for the purposes of analysis and interpretation, it was not necessary to separate the data gathered from these two categories of participant. All participants generally entered enthusiastically into the spirit of the interview, and were very responsive and articulate. They were mainly relaxed and animated, and spontaneously shared detailed insights about their singing, their feelings and their life in general. The choral singers who were previously unknown to me were willing to divulge a surprising amount of personal information. Many singers were quite self-analytical and interested in their own perceptions and reactions in various performance situations, as well as making observations regarding the behaviour of other singers and the interactions within their choral ensembles. Several participants later reflected on the interview process, reporting that it had been

interesting and beneficial to have the opportunity to talk and to think about this area.

Although all of the participants who have worked with me as a conductor have also worked with several other musical directors, the interview process could, arguably, have been subject to demand characteristics, both in terms of the interviewee trying to say what they believe the researcher wants to hear (McCracken, 1988), and in terms of my own choir members possibly being reluctant to criticise me in my dual role as researcher-practitioner. However, these potential hazards were mitigated by emphasizing the participant's role as the expert on their own lives, emotions and experiences; reiterating that there were consequently no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, or particular expectations; making a clear distinction between my research role as an 'explorer' in this area, and my role as a conductor and musician. This approach was effective, as some participants provided thoughtful feedback regarding my own practice as a conductor, in addition to discussing their experiences elsewhere. It is acknowledged that some of the participants who work with me may have raised some topics in the hope that this might, within our own particular choral ensembles, prompt me to address any pertinent concerns. Regardless of the motivation, however, it was beneficial to receive both positive and negative feedback about my own work, as well as in relation to other musical leaders, and the participants' willingness to share this feedback indicates a level of openness and honesty with me.

2.6. Analysis and Interpretation

In keeping with the subjective essence of the topic, and the phenomenological approach, the data were analysed and interpreted using a process based on interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Emergent themes and significant issues were identified from the data, categorised and organised into superordinate and subordinate themes which reflected the content of the interviews and the main concerns of the participants (Smith, 1995, 2004; Smith et al., 1999). It is recognised that 'the original whole of the interview becomes a set of parts [...] but these then come together in another new whole at the end of the analysis in the write-up' (Smith et al., 2009: 91). By staying as close as possible to the raw data (Janesick, 2000), the integrity of the research should be maintained, and the voices of the participants can be adequately represented, even after analysis and interpretation:

At each stage the analysis does indeed take you further away from the participant and includes more of you. However, 'the you' is closely involved with the lived experiences of the participant – and the resulting analysis will be a product of both of your collaborative efforts (p. 92).

Although the results of this study are not presented in an individually tailored, chronological life history format, I have kept in mind the essential qualities of the life history approach, ensuring that the participants are enabled to 'speak for and about themselves' (Atkinson, 1998: 5). The data from the interviews have been organised into themes relevant to this study, whilst remaining faithful to the ethos of life history research by highlighting 'the most important influences, experiences, circumstances,

issues, themes, and lessons of a lifetime' (p. 7). As it was of paramount importance to allow the singers' voices to be heard in this project, no categories or codes were allocated in advance of the analysis and interpretation (Janesick, 2000). Themes and significant issues emerged inductively as the data were examined, thereby giving priority to allowing the participants to express themselves in their own words.

The aim of accurately reflecting the significance of issues from the participants' viewpoint has been achieved by a comprehensive but adaptable approach to identifying themes. Prevalence of occurrence has been the main criterion. However, other factors, such as the immediacy and eloquence with which a topic is introduced or summarised by a participant, and the extent to which an interviewee's contribution illuminates other portions of the data, may also indicate the significance of the theme (Smith et al., 1999). During the analysis I have therefore presented particularly salient quotes summarising some of the main issues and, where appropriate, commented upon other indications of significance, such as the recurring nature of a theme and the stage of the interview in which the theme was spontaneously raised by the participant. No software analysis programmes were used, as I preferred a more direct, organic approach, which enabled me to probe and absorb the large amounts of data involved (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). This manual process also allowed for some of the subtleties, nuances, ambiguities and inconsistencies to be captured and identified in a way that, so far, only the human 'researcher as instrument' can (Janesick, 2000). Analysis was complete when 'saturation' was reached (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), as no further fresh themes were being identified, and no new information relating to the existing data-driven themes was discovered.

My own practical experience as a conductor and singer has naturally been a 'sensitising' influence on my research interests (Blumer, 1969, cited in Charmaz, 2006), and provided a useful point of departure for my current study (Charmaz, 2000). However, I have adopted an analytical approach which has, as far as possible, allowed the themes presented in this study to emerge from the interview content rather than imposing preconceived ideas and theories upon the data (Charmaz, 2006). Systematic emergent theme analysis of the transcriptions was used to ensure that themes and concepts were developed inductively, with the aim of generating ideas and theories rather than verifying them (Glaser 1982, cited in Charmaz, 2000). This approach can help researchers to 'remain attuned to our subjects' views of their realities, rather than assume that we share the same views and worlds' (Charmaz, 2000: 515). This was an important consideration for me, as I participate in the activities of those I am studying, and I am therefore likely to have had some shared experiences, albeit from a different perspective.

2.7. A Grounded Approach

Because the findings are grounded in the data, I have adopted a number of methods from grounded theory, including analytical memo-making during categorisation, in order to explore and elucidate emerging themes, and completing the literature review after carrying out an independent analysis of the data. The delayed approach to the literature review has been recommended with the aims of accurately reflecting the themes as they emerge from the data (Charmaz, 1995), and avoiding seeing the data 'through the lens of earlier ideas', 'received theory', or other preconceptions (Charmaz, 2006: 165). However, a certain amount of pre-existing knowledge on the

part of the researcher is, arguably, inevitable (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), and a familiarity with earlier studies can suggest useful research questions and approaches to analysis, as well as sensitising the researcher to 'subtle nuances in data' (p.37). For this reason, a preliminary literature review has been carried out (see Chapter 1), encompassing the main theoretical concepts that underpin this study. The remainder of the relevant literature has been examined in response to the themes emerging from the data. Each of the core analytical chapters will therefore contain an introductory literature review related to the main emergent theme to be examined within the chapter. I have thus aimed to acknowledge the starting points of my interest in this area, both from my professional experience and from my initial exploration of the literature, whilst allowing the thesis structure to reflect the data-driven approach.

In accordance with the inductive nature of this study, my findings will be presented thematically in the following chapters, with direct quotations from the participants reflecting the factors they perceive as significant in relation to choral confidence. In this way, I intend to fulfil my aim of staying close to the original data throughout, as well as representing 'multiple voices, views, and visions in [a] rendering of lived experience' (Charmaz, 2000: 525). In order to fulfil the ethical requirements relating to confidentiality and anonymity, all participants have been allocated anonymous identification codes, with 'S' indicating a quotation from a singer participating in an individual interview, and 'FG' indicating an extract from a focus group session. Venues, geographical locations, and people (including other singers, conductors and family members) have also been anonymised. In the data tables, gestures and other forms of non-verbal communication have been described in brackets. Editorial amendments, including ellipses signifying cuts to the extracts, have

been presented in square brackets. Ellipses presented without brackets indicate pauses or hesitations in the recorded dialogue.

In the next chapter, the participants' definitions of confidence, and some of their perceptions of the ways in which this is manifested in vocal performance, will comprise the first stage of my exploration of the factors affecting confidence amongst amateur choral singers.

3. NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

3.1. BACKGROUND

3.1.1. Extra-musical Aspects of Performance

With the aim of obtaining a definition of confident performance that might be directly relevant to amateur choral singing, and from which some practical applications might be inferred, all participants were asked to describe how a confident singer might perform and behave (see Appendices 9 and 10). In response to this question all three focus groups and thirteen of the individual interviewees immediately and spontaneously talked at length about aspects of non-verbal communication, including body language, appearance, presentation and physical elements of performance which might indicate confidence. A brief review of some of the literature relevant to body language and physical appearance will therefore be presented as an introduction to the data in this section.

Many extra-musical aspects of vocal performance, including dress and behavioural conventions, are derived from social rituals, which have been defined as the 'stereotyped repetition of activity for magical effect' (Wilson, 1994: 23). The repeated patterns of ritualistic behaviour persist partly due to habit, but also because they acquire significance for the participants, which can be retained even when the original function of the behaviour has been lost (p.23). Functions of rituals, which typically incorporate musical contributions, can include commemorating important historical occasions, celebrating social events or rites of passage, and creating and reinforcing group identity and cohesion (Gregory, 1997). Some of the ceremonial elements of traditional ritualistic behaviour have become established as an integral

part of musical performance. Examples of such ritualistic elements in Western art music include adhering to a particular formal dress code; the manner in which musicians and singers enter and leave the performing area; and performance etiquette, such as publicly acknowledging and showing appreciation to fellow performers (Davidson, 1997). These conventions extend to audience behaviour, such as maintaining silence during the performance and applauding at certain points. It could be argued that, whilst the formality of such Western classical performances adds to the sense of occasion for the audience and performers, it may also be partly responsible for the sense of pressure and self-consciousness that some musicians and singers experience:

Singing to oneself [...] is likely to be perceived differently from singing on the concert stage in front of a paying audience. The former is private and personal, relaxed and unselfconscious. In contrast, public singing involves a greater sense of 'performance', of implied 'correctness' against some perceived expectation of what counts as 'appropriate' musical behaviour. (Welch, 2000b: 1)

However, it is also possible that conforming to these social and performance conventions may, for some performers, add to their sense of self-confidence, as the instinct to conform, and the discomfort arising from failing to do so, is very deep-seated (Asch, 1955).

3.1.2. Body Language and Physical Appearance

Previous research into the impact of extra-musical aspects of performance has examined body movement in relation to interpretation, co-performer communication, musical coordination and synchronisation; audience engagement; and conveying mood and expression (Castellano et al., 2008; Davidson, 1993, 1994, 2001). In a series of studies examining the impact of physical appearance and presentation on assessments

of the musical performance of singers, violinists and pianists (Wapnick et al., 1997, 1998, 2000), individuals rated as more 'attractive' were consistently given higher ratings than 'less attractive' performers. It was acknowledged, however, that the definition of 'attractiveness' is inherently subjective. In the initial study of singers, the investigation was limited to the effect of 'physical attractiveness' on evaluations of musical performances, but other factors emerged as confounding variables. Although performers were asked to dress as if for an audition, the participants interpreted this request in a number of different ways, and their choice of clothing may have had an effect on assessments (Wapnick, et al., 1997). The body language employed by the singers may also have made a difference to the evaluations:

Singers who were more animated, smiled more often, and made more eye contact with the video-camera may have been rated as more attractive than singers who did not so behave. (p. 477)

Dress and stage behaviour, as well as attractiveness, often have an influence on the evaluation of instrumental performance (Wapnick et al., 1998, 2000). The effects of concert dress and physical appearance have been found to have a particular effect on perceptions of female classical soloists' musical abilities over a range of genres (Griffiths, 2010). It has therefore been suggested that audiences have strong, culturally defined expectations of appropriate dress for performers, which is related to the musical genre, and that dress and body movements which are perceived as inappropriate to the occasion may have a detrimental effect on audience perceptions of performers' musical abilities. Performance quality ratings in high school solo vocal performances have been proven to be affected by stage deportment and attire, and there is some awareness amongst school children of the impact of these extra-musical factors (Howard, 2012). Similarly, music students realise that evaluations of their

performance are likely to be affected not only by their vocal skill and interpretation of the repertoire, but also by physical image, including dress, hair style and make up; facial expression and eye contact with the audience; extraneous body movements; and appropriate expressive gesture and body language (Coimbra et al., 2001).

3.1.3. Facial Feedback and Emotion

Research into the relationship between non-verbal communication and emotion has a long history. Darwin (1872) believed that the intensity of emotion is directly linked with its physical manifestation and, furthermore, proposed that facial expression reflected from other individuals can have a profound impact on the subjective experience of emotion. The explanation for this reciprocity between individuals was based on observations of instinctive empathy:

When a child cries or laughs, he knows in a general manner what he is doing and what he feels; so that a very small exertion of reason would tell him what crying and laughing meant in others (p. 361).

This empathic reaction to others also relates to the following definition of the 'chameleon effect':

Non-conscious mimicry of the postures, mannerisms, facial expressions, and other behaviors of one's interaction partners, such that one's behavior passively and unintentionally changes to match that of others in one's current social environment. (Chartrand and Bargh, 1999: 893)

The natural tendency to mimic the non-verbal behaviour of others leads to a predisposition to share some elements of their emotional state (Ekman et al., 1983, 1991 and 1990, cited in Ekman, 1992). This plays an important part in social bonding, and may have an impact on the perceived cohesion in musical ensembles:

Perception causes similar behavior, and the perception of the similar behavior on the part of the other creates shared feelings of empathy and rapport. (Chartrand and Bargh, 1999: 897)

This partly explains the 'emotional contagion' (Falkenberg et al., 2008) which can accompany performing with other people, as perceptions of physical expressions of emotion induce mimicry. This, in turn, provides a source of facial feedback about the individual's own emotional state, and can result in the sharing of emotion. This reciprocal ability to 'infect' others with an emotion or to 'catch' the emotions of others is dependent upon the 'mirror neuron' system':

Every time we are looking at someone performing an action, the same motor circuits that are recruited when we ourselves perform that action are concurrently activated. (Gallese and Goldman, 1998: 495)

This process allows humans to learn from others by mimicking their behaviour, and explains the physical mirroring of body language and mannerisms during social interaction, as well as accounting for emotional contagion. Mirror neuron theory or the 'mimetic hypothesis' has been applied to aspects of musical performance, including musical affect, and the creation of musical meaning (Cox, 2001). Emotional contagion experienced in musical performance may include a wide range of feelings related to self-confidence or apprehension, enjoyment and excitement, as well as affective states related to musical interpretation and expression.

The physical portrayal of an attitude or emotion can have powerful repercussions, even if, at first, the emotion is not genuinely experienced. When experimental participants were instructed to deliberately replicate facial expressions, the majority reported a physical change (with physiological reactions confirmed by measurements of EEG activity), and also began to experience the simulated emotion (Ekman et al., 1983, 1991 and 1990 cited in Ekman, 1992). Further research on 'embodied cognition', i.e. the interconnectedness of physical and psychological states,

has confirmed that manipulating one's facial expression can subjectively affect internal, emotional states (Carney et al., 2010). Strack et al. (1988) demonstrated that holding a pen horizontally between one's lips to ensure contraction of the zygomaticus major (the 'smile muscle') can induce or intensify positive feelings such as pleasure and amusement. The converse was also true, as holding the pen in a way which inhibited zygomatic contraction (i.e. pursing one's lips), so that smiling was not possible, resulted in less positive affective states.

These effects of facial feedback have been attributed to cognitive processes, such as self-perception mechanisms (Bem, 1967; Laird, 1974). This suggests that individuals use their own facial expressions to derive information about their own emotions and attitudes. The experience of smiling can result in a subjective perception of increased positive emotion, whilst frowning can increase subjective perceptions of negative affect. Physiological responses to assuming a particular expression may contribute to these subjective emotional experiences, even in the absence of any conscious awareness of having assumed the expression providing the relevant facial feedback (Ekman, 1992). Furthermore, there is neurological evidence of a 'central, hard-wired connection between the motor cortex and other areas of the brain involved in directing the physiological changes which occur during emotion' (p. 35). FMRI investigations have confirmed that the subjective experience of deliberately adopting emotional facial expressions results in activity in the same areas of the brain that would be activated when the emotion is actually experienced (Adolphs, 2002; Wild et al., 2003). This is likely to have a powerful impact in musical performance situations involving the expression or simulation of emotions, and may have some direct relevance to the subjective experience of choral singing.

3.1.4. Posture and Self-perception

Posture and gesture can have deterministic effects on emotions and thought processes. Tilting the head upwards can induce a sense of pride (Stepper and Strack, 1993), and hunched postures generally elicit feelings of depression and helplessness (Riskind and Gotay, 1982). Body posture also has an effect on self-evaluations, including 'thought confidence' (Briñol et al., 2009). As a result of asking participants to note their best and worst qualities whilst sitting in a 'confident posture' (defined by researchers as maintaining an erect spine and expanded chest), or in a 'doubtful posture' (slouching with a curved spine), it was confirmed that subjectively experiencing confident postures can activate feelings of confidence (p. 1,053).

A common understanding of the relationship between body language and emotion was indicated, as the body postures examined in the above experiments had clear meanings for the participants, who generally shared the researchers' associations of particular postures with certain affective states (p. 1,061). Although it was not definitively proven that posture affected general confidence levels, it did have a significant impact upon participants' confidence in their own thoughts and self-evaluations.

In this chapter some of the effects of posture, physical appearance, body language and non-verbal communication will now be further explored, with particular reference to amateur choral singing.

3.2. FINDINGS

3.2.1. Body Language

It is down to body language a lot of the time - the way you stand and the way you look. **FG1.F.11**

In all three focus groups and ten of the individual interviews, body language was cited as a significant physical manifestation of confidence (Table 3.1). When participants were asked to describe a confident performer (see Appendices 9 and 10), posture was the first and most frequently recurring theme that arose in response to this question.

Table 3.1. Posture

| |
|--|
| It shows in their body language usually doesn't it? If somebody's sort of standing like that [demonstrates hunched posture] then they don't look confident, but whatever they are doing with their body, particularly their arms, I think that shows their confidence. FG1.H.11 |
|--|

Participants had very specific expectations regarding the main elements of confident body language. This, for many singers, was evidenced by effective personal presentation, standing tall, adopting an open stance and communicating expressively (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2. Poise and openness

| |
|--|
| FG3.C: Posture, I guess is part of it. How they stand and present themselves [...] FG3.N: Actually I have an image of somebody being a bit taller, you know. You stand upright [demonstrates] and hold yourself taller. FG3.C: Body language, I think, is a big thing...in confidence. FG3.28 |
| [Soprano's] very confident – just the way she is. She's very open, she's very forward, and she just goes for it, whether she gets it right or not. But I mean, she does, so she's obviously confident – 'I know this'. [...] Her whole body language is very open, and she'll turn to the audience and sing, which she did with her little solo bit. And that, to me, is a very confident singer. S1.28 |
| I would expect them to be...just having that piece of string through their head, pulling them upstanding, quite poised, and quite happily looking at the audience. S4.47 |

Like S4 (Table 3.2), several participants specified ‘happy and relaxed’ facial expressions as part of this physical portrayal of confidence (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3. Being ‘enjoyable to watch’

| |
|--|
| <p>FG2.E: I think a confident performer is someone who looks really happy and relaxed when they are doing it. Like they have always done it. [General agreement] FG2.E: They are enjoyable to watch as well. [General agreement] FG2.B: Exactly. You don’t think ‘Oh my God, they look nervous, as if they are worried about the solo’. FG2.13</p> |
| <p>If they come into the room or onto the stage with a big smile and walk with confidence. FG1.E.11</p> |

Smiling was seen as the most obvious ‘sign of confidence’ (S12.16) amongst singers, as it was interpreted as indicating a level of relaxation about the performance. S1 suggested that smiling can reflect singers’ confidence in their level of preparation, and indicates that they feel they can achieve a good performance. S14’s description of smiling at the audience as an expression of pleasure in response to their attendance (Table 3.4) suggests a tactic for performers; a positive approach to the presence of the audience is likely to make it easier to adopt a welcoming smile, endowing the singers with a more confident appearance.

Table 3.4. Smiling

| |
|---|
| <p>They smile as well ‘cause they’re confident, and they know ‘We can do this now. We can actually do this on our own’. And yeah, it’s the whole posture, I think. S1.30</p> |
| <p>It’s a case of smiling at somebody before you sing. You see them looking at you, so you smile, because you’re pleased they’re there. That sort of thing. S14.25</p> |

Several participants (Tables 3.3 and 3.4) felt that a relaxed, happy appearance makes the performance more enjoyable for the audience to watch, as it can indicate that the singers are not worried about their part in the occasion, which is likely to imbue the performance with a sense of positive expectation. This is potentially cyclical,

as a confident appearance which provokes a positive audience response is likely to result in an increasingly confident and competent performance. Self-efficacy will then be built upon this sense of task mastery as well as upon the encouragement from the audience (Bandura, 1977).

The same process can apply to the non-verbal interactions between singers and conductors (Table 3.5); the interchange of positive body language and facial expressions can help to build choral confidence.

Table 3.5. Smiling conductors

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| I need [conductors] to look at me and smile [laughs], just to give me confidence. S1.35 |
| Someone who smiles at you! I think, you know...will look at you and smile [...] Certainly, standing there and looking at people and smiling, as they're singing, really helps. If it looks like they're pleased, that certainly helps. S4.48 |

In some cases, negative body language from the conductor has an adverse effect on confidence. S4 (Table 3.6) described the phenomenon of some conductors insisting on being attended to, whilst seemingly being unaware that their facial expression and general demeanour is discouraging eye contact from the singers.

Table 3.6. Being 'frightened of what they see'

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| Sometimes there's been situations where - maybe because that particular part of that music is particularly tricky, or there's some sort of language issues or whatever – and you're not looking as much as you should do...this kind of like [frowns threateningly] ...this kind of thing. You feel like you're with a schoolteacher. And they're pointing at their eyes and looking at you and glaring at you. And again, that throws you and completely undermines you. And it makes you look stupid! [...] I think the only time people don't do it so much is when they're nervous or whatever, and they don't want to be looking up because they're frightened of what they see so they just look down. S3.33-34 |
|--|

3.2.2. Interpretation, Expression, and Immersion in Performance

The emphasis on facial expression and body language extended to a consideration of audience interaction. Communicative and expressive elements, including maintaining eye contact with audience members, were seen as important components of confident singing.

Table 3.7. Audience interaction

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| I think a confident performer stands and looks at the audience or looks up. You've got to look at the leader but you need to have some eye contact otherwise they don't think you're singing to them. It takes a lot for you to get yourself to the stage where you dare look at people's faces and look at their reaction. FG2.K.13 |
| I think it's a bit about eye contact, and the way you're looking as well. So I think a confident performer is not scared of looking at individuals in the audience. When I've seen [alto] singing, you know, she will <i>sing</i> , and she'll sing <i>at</i> someone, and then she'll do another verse, and sing at somebody else, and <i>that's</i> confidence. FG3.N.30 |

FG3.N (Table 3.7) and S4 (Table 3.8) both gave detailed descriptions of soloists who were able to physically engage with the audience, as well as being able to make eye contact with them, and seemed to see this as the epitome of confident performance. This level of interaction is not usually a specific requirement for choral singers, but it was interpreted as a physical demonstration of a level of self-confidence that these participants deemed admirable in their peers.

Table 3.8. Audience engagement

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| Looking in people's eyes rather than looking over their heads or avoiding eye contact. Something like that will, for me, be a confident singer. And someone who's not singing from the words, who's not singing it rote would be a confident sign for me. Someone who's quite happy to move around. [Alto], you know, very confident singer – never has any words. She'll come round an audience and sing, sit on people's laps, mess up their hair and all that sort of stuff. Very confident singer, definitely. S4.47 |
|---|

S1 (Table 3.9) suggested that being able to make eye contact with the audience not only gives the impression of self-confidence, but also indicates a confidence-

boosting level of familiarity with the text and the music, which allows them to be fully involved with the performance.

Table 3.9. 'Giving it everything'

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| I can always tell with the basses, particularly with [husband], once they've got it, they're different, they're a lot more relaxed, and they give it everything. I don't mean loud, but they're straight in, and they're not down here in the books, they're actually looking up, because they know that's the note I'm singing. If they're not so confident, their body language changes, and they're tentative and not so sure. S1.28 |
| They sing together. If there's a couple of them that know they've got it right, I know now they'll go against [bass 1], which they didn't before. And again, it's just watching the way they are. 'Cause I know if [bass 2] and [bass 3] get it they will not actually sing what [bass 1] is singing. S1.30 |

This familiarity with the music, and confidence that the singers know their notes, can help them to sing confidently, even if there are some choir members who are distractingly inaccurate. S1 (Table 3.9) described a situation in the bass section, where knowing that they know their line helps them to counteract the effects of one of their less competent peers. S13 (Table 3.10) extended the definition of competence, or task mastery, in choral singing to include breath control, phrasing, interpretation and musical understanding rather than simply learning the vocal line. He contrasted the experience of singing music with which one has basic familiarity with performances in which the music becomes so ingrained that singing it is almost second nature.

Table 3.10. Making the music 'part of you'

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| In control. That is to say, your breathing is...You're on top of your breathing. You're on top of your notes. You're on top of your interpretation. You're understanding the music. There are some pieces of music where you know the notes, and you sing it and that's fine, and there are other pieces of music which are part of you, which is quite different. S13.18 |
|--|

This immersion in the performance and in the music can, in itself, help to build confidence, as well as being an indication of competence. Several participants stated

that they see total absorption in the music as representative of confidence in other singers, whilst some confided that they use this as a strategy to build their own confidence (Table 3.11), as it helps them to concentrate on the music, rather than dwelling on the audience's potential reaction or on their own anxieties about the performance.

Table 3.11. 'Being in the song'

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| I think it's being <i>in</i> the song as well. It's being in the zone. If you're so engrossed in the song itself that you're singing, then that produces confidence as well, because you're just involved in the story or the tune or whatever. It produces confidence because you know what you're doing. FG3.Q.31 |
| I think that when I'm actually doing the singing, that's where I am. Just <i>in</i> the singing at the time...I think it is this idea that once I'm singing that's all I'm doing, and I really don't see or hear or notice anything else that's going on around me, [...] Actually, even when I know I've got the wrong note, that's not noticing what's going on around me, that's just me and my singing. S7.16 |

One of the singers added a further dimension to this strategy, explaining that she found that musical complexity acted as a useful distraction from her nerves (Table 3.12). Having to concentrate on demanding repertoire helped her to become immersed in the music, rather than thinking about other elements of the performance, such as the presence or opinion of the audience, which this particular singer cited as a factor in her anxieties about choral performance. It should be noted that this interviewee was one of only two participants in this study who had studied music at tertiary level, and that this attitude towards complexity may not be common amongst amateur singers. However, it is a reminder that choosing suitable repertoire may have a positive effect on the confidence of singers.

Table 3.12. 'Thinking exactly what I'm doing'

The more complex it is the more I enjoy it 'cause it makes me think more...and this is going to sound really weird but, because it's more complex, and because it's a challenge, I look forward to the concert because I think 'Right. Nerves under control. You can do this'...It takes away the fear...because I'm thinking *exactly* what I'm doing, and I never even think about the audience at all. **S1.19**

Although S1 (Table 3.12) preferred singing complex music, repertoire did not emerge as a significant issue within this study. However, S4's 'virtuous circle' (Table 3.13) of liking the song, singing it well, knowing that the performance is good, enjoying the experience, and improving as a result, is a clear description of the positive effects of task mastery on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) in the choral context. Also his description of the spontaneous smiles evoked by enjoying the music relates to the fact that positive expressions can induce as well as reflect affect in individuals (Ekman et al., 1983, 1991 and 1990, cited in Ekman, 1992; Strack et al., 1988), and between group members (Chartrand and Bargh, 1999; Falkenberg et al., 2008).

Table 3.13. 'Virtuous circles'

It's that virtuous circle thing, you know. You like something, you sing it better, you get a kick from it, you sing it better the next time, and everybody's smiling and it's all getting better and better and better. Whereas, you've got one that you don't like, or is less easy to sing, then you are definitely more nervous singing it and, you know...And you're more critical of yourself. It just takes longer and longer...And it may be something that you *never* get to like and you never really think you sing it that well, possibly. But I think definitely the ones that you like are easier to sing. **S4.21**

S13, who defined himself as a very confident choral singer, was eloquent on the subject of the singers' relationship with the music (Table 3.14).

Table 3.14. 'Serving the music'

You are a servant of the music. You are the servant of the person who's composed this beautiful piece of music, whoever it may be. And the *last* thing you are doing is saying 'Hey, look at me!' That's not what it's about, to me. **S13.11**

This total immersion in the music may partly account for S13's confident attitude, as he described putting the music first, rather than worrying about anyone's opinion of him personally. He interpreted his role as a choral singer as a conduit for the music and, as such, felt that he had a duty to convey the composer's vision to the best of his ability. Other participants (Tables 3.15 and 3.16) felt that confident singers were identifiable by their capacity to interpret the music and communicate the meaning of the song, and by their involvement in the music.

Table 3.15. 'In the zone'

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| <p>There is this confidence...They tell a story. They're in the zone, they're into that part, and this charisma comes across, blended with the quality of the voice and the song they're singing. S8.41</p> |
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3.2.3. Presentation and Preparation

S11 and S6 (Table 3.16) both extended the suggestion that confidence can be gained from totally concentrating on the music, by proposing that working on presentation, interpretation and communication in addition to simply learning the notes and lyrics, can help the singer to feel more confident in the performance.

Table 3.16. 'Telling a little story'

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| <p>You're telling a little story really, aren't you? That's what you're doing. And I think that's another thing – as someone who sings, you sing words, and perhaps you've heard it before, and then sometimes you think to yourself 'My goodness, I didn't realise what that was actually about'. Until you've actually sang it. And if you've done it a few times, I think you tend to put it over better in that sense...It makes it a bit more confidence building. S11.26</p> |
|---|

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|--|
| <p>What's nice would be to feel that you're not just singing the number, following all the signposts or whatever, but to really <i>feel</i> that you're telling the story. Like, I don't know whether it was 'Annie Laurie' or 'Home Sweet Home' or something, but I think we really got to putting feeling into those, above just singing the song [...] You've got to add that little bit of <i>je ne sais quoi</i>, that <i>colour</i>. S6.26-27</p> |
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The majority of participants made the point that this level of interpretation, along with the confidence that can result from becoming absorbed in the expressiveness of the performance, can only be achieved when the choir is well prepared (Table 3.17).

Table 3.17. ‘Performing’ rather than ‘just singing’

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| <p>FG3.N: It’s a bit like it’s second nature, really. You don’t have to think about the words – they just come out...</p> <p>FG3.Q: You’re so well rehearsed that you’re just <i>in</i> the performance.</p> <p>FG3.D: You then go from just singing something to actually <i>performing</i> something.</p> <p>FG3.31</p> |
| <p>I’ve put two words down there – prepared and rehearsed. And I think that in itself produces, portrays confidence. FG3.Q.29</p> |
| <p>I guess that’s one way you can talk about a confident singer. Whatever the level they’re at, they <i>know</i> what they’re singing, they know they’re getting it right, and they’re enjoying what they’re doing. S5.33</p> |

Thorough preparation was cited throughout all of the interviews and focus groups as an important factor in confident performance. Feeling well prepared helps to enable singers to immerse themselves in the music to the extent that they can communicate it to the audience, and to present their interpretation expressively. This not only gives the impression of confidence and enjoyment, but helps them to forget their own anxieties about performing. Several singers made the connection between the level of preparation required for work-related ‘performances’, such as presentations and sales pitches, and the amount of practice necessary for confident choral performances (Table 3.18).

Table 3.18. Five ‘P’s

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| <p>In Sales, we used to call it ‘The Five Ps’. ‘Poor Planning is Piss Poor Presentation!’ [All laugh] [...] If you didn’t do your preparation, then your presentation was going to be crap. And seven-eighths of performance is preparation. And one eighth is performance. And it doesn’t make any difference if that’s a presentation or singing in front of an audience. FG3.Q.32</p> |
| <p>We used to say, as project managers, ‘Failing to plan is planning to fail’. [...] That preparation, being prepared, gives you the confidence to do it. FG3.D.59</p> |

Practice and preparation were seen as crucial factors in making a vocal performance appear to be ‘easy’ and natural (Table 3.19). All focus groups and interviewees valued meticulous rehearsal as an integral part of creating this effect, as well as the sensation of confidence.

Table 3.19. ‘Practice, practice, practice’

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|---|
| When people have spent all that time, the preparation, the effort, and everything else, then it looks easy, and [other people] think ‘Ooh, I couldn’t possibly do that’. They haven’t seen that they’ve been practising. FG3.D.72 |
| If I had a pound for every time somebody has come up to me and said ‘I couldn’t <i>possibly</i> go on stage and do what you’re doing’... Everybody <i>can</i> [...] You’re not just given a song and you stand up and sing it. You practice and you practice and you practice and you practice. And that’s what rehearsals are all about. FG3.B.71 |

The main aspects of musical rehearsal mentioned by participants included ‘note bashing’ (FG1.X.32; S8.56; S6); learning words (FG3.N.34; S5.52), familiarization with lyrics in foreign languages (S3.2; S10); and memorization (FG1.X; S8.56) Different levels of confidence were related to varying levels of preparation and practice (Table 3.20), with some reports of the adverse effects of under-rehearsal.

Table 3.20. Never again!

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|---|
| My confidence depended on how well I knew the music. If I <i>knew</i> I knew the music, my confidence was fine. If I knew I was going to struggle with some bits of the music, my confidence would decrease. S16.6 |
| The [operatic society] did a show where we were totally under-rehearsed and it was just awful. I went on the first night not knowing it and I went on the last night not knowing it and I swore I would never, ever have that again. That was just awful. You cringed at the, you know, the thought of it. FG1.C.9 |

The singers quoted in Table 3.21 provided useful summaries of the portrayal of confidence during performance, covering some of the main themes of this chapter so far. FG3.Q suggested that getting into ‘performance mode’, ready to entertain the audience, helps to focus the mind, and to create a sense of confidence. For him, ‘thinking performance’ presumably encompassed aiming to achieve the appropriate

standard for a public performance, and remembering to have a sense of occasion, which helps him to step into some kind of performance ‘persona’. S3 specifically listed some of the practical performance skills that indicate confidence to her, including communicating with the audience, connecting with the conductor and remembering to look and sound confident. This singer described the appearance of choral confidence in terms of vocal projection, clear diction, and expressive performance.

Table 3.21. ‘Thinking performance’

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|---|
| Once you’re away from the rehearsal room, and you’re ‘on’ in front of the audience, that’s when you’re thinking different. You’re thinking performance. And that produces and portrays confidence as well. FG3.Q.31 |
| [A confident singer is] somebody that, even if they do need to refer to the music or whatever, they tend to be able to look up and over. They have a good connection with the person conducting. They have, or try and get a connection with the audience. They’re not afraid to have good diction and open their mouths and be expressive. I think, to me, that’s what I would say is being a confident singer. S3.12 |

3.2.4. Conveying Confidence

All three focus groups and eight of the individual interviewees spontaneously raised the question of whether or not the appearance of confidence is always genuine (Table 3.22). They discussed in some detail whether the presentation of confidence can be manufactured, not only to persuade the audience of one’s competence and assuredness but also to boost the singer’s own sense of self-efficacy. Conversations between participants in the focus groups were particularly revealing in relation to this aspect of singing in public, with some members disclosing their own ability to assume a confident performance persona. In some cases, it was admitted that the adopted attitude of self-confidence is not always genuinely felt.

Table 3.22. ‘Putting on a different face’

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| <p>FG1.F: You tend to think they are very outgoing people but that could just be a mask that once they’re in front of people, dressed differently, doing a different job, then they’re somebody else. It’s an act.</p> <p>FG1.X: It’s like when you do a part on the stage isn’t it?</p> <p>FG1.F: You are being that person and not being yourself.</p> <p>FG1.C: That makes a big difference. You can do an awful lot of hiding behind a part that you probably wouldn’t do.</p> <p>FG1.X: People who do perform well they don’t show any nerves - they probably are nervous but they probably don’t show it outwardly and that makes you feel really confident.</p> <p>FG1.K: Putting on a...you’ve got to put on a different face. FG1.12</p> |
| <p>FG3.N: I wouldn’t say I’m a naturally confident person, particularly. If you think I am, I think it’s a bit of an act.</p> <p>FG3.H: Some people naturally look good on stage. It’s like [my wife] [...] Even though she’s scared to death when she’s on stage, she just looks like she belongs there, and I don’t know what that is. I wish I had some of that. FG3.28</p> |

In Focus Group 1, questions from the participants regarding the genuine nature of confident appearance arose very early in the session. Several interviewees wondered whether other singers’ confidence could be a ‘mask’ or an ‘act’ that helps them to perform effectively (Tables 3.22-3.28). Some of those who have theatrical experience likened this concept to taking a role in a musical or a play, and felt that ‘hiding behind a part’ sometimes helped them to perform more confidently in these settings. FG3 and S4 gave examples of singers who look confident on stage, but who are not necessarily as self-assured as they appear. The wife of FG3.H (Table 3.22) provides an instance of someone who is actually known to be ‘scared to death’ but who manages to give the impression of absolute poise and security. S4 and S6 both made speculative comments about apparently confident singers, whilst wondering whether their relaxed approach is real or all part of the ‘act’ (Table 3.23).

Table 3.23. *Is it real?*

[Alto], you know, very confident singer – never has any words...Very confident singer, definitely. And relaxed, looks like she's relaxed when she's doing it, you know. She might *not* be, but she does look relaxed when she's doing it. **S4.47**

Even...professional singers and professional performers are a seething mass of nerves, aren't they? [laughs] Yet they appear so confident. [Fellow choir members] seem very confident when they're singing on the stage. Maybe it's because I've never talked to them about it, and maybe they *are*, you see. [laughs] **S6.49**

During Focus Group 3 (Table 3.24), the singers addressed one of their peers about his own appearance of confidence, and revelations were made about the reality behind this.

Table 3.24. *'Being a swan'*

FG3.D: It's the *presence* they seem to bring. It's almost as if...They don't look as if they're worried, they're not shaking...they're just sort of *there*. I mean, [to N] when you did the [comic opera], and you were doing that thing, you just *really* stood out, you know.

FG3.N: Really?! [laughs]

FG3.D: Really confident, and it was all there. We never thought anything was going to go wrong or anything...

FG3.N: That's 'cause I had all the words up behind [conductor]! [laughs]

FG3.D: It doesn't matter how you did it. It's that sort of stuff you see – that people are confident that they're gonna do it.

FG3.N: That's interesting, 'cause I was pooping myself that I was gonna get the words wrong – I totally was!

FG3.C: And most people *are* nervous, aren't they? Some are *a lot* better at not showing it.

FG3.B: It's all about being a swan above the surface, never mind what's going on below the surface. You've got to keep the *swan* in front of the audience. And as long as you can do that, then you'll exude that air of confidence. **FG3.28**

There is a sharp contrast here (Table 3.24) between the perspective of FG3.D, who was an audience member for the performance under discussion, and the perceptions of FG3.N, the singer who was playing a principal role in an amateur operatic society production. From the point of view of the audience, the singer did not look anxious or physically uncomfortable, and even could be described as having the elusive quality of 'stage presence'. His outward confidence persuaded the audience

and cast that everything was under control. However, from the point of view of the singer, he was well aware of some of the things that could go wrong. These group members provided an important reminder of the suspension of disbelief that plays an important part in any theatrical production, and that this is partly achieved by the appearance of confidence on the part of the performers, no matter how that is effected. FG3.C acknowledged that most singers are probably nervous, but that the main difference between confidence and nervousness lies in the ability to conceal one's true feelings for the duration of the performance. The final image in this dialogue, of the swan paddling madly under the water whilst floating gracefully on the surface, provided an apt summary of the illusory world of the performer. All of this suggests a strategy for building confidence, by using the acting ability of singers to portray self-assuredness on stage. It may even be the case that, during choral performance, the pretence of confidence may eventually transform into a genuine emotion just as it did in the empirical experiments related to facial feedback (Ekman, 1992; Stepper and Strack, 1993; Strack et al., 1988).

3.2.5. The Performance Persona

FG3.B (Table 3.25) compared his past experience as an unwilling performer with his present self-professed confidence, which has come from practising putting on his 'performance persona' rather than feeling that he is appearing as himself. This strategy seems to have helped to reduce the inhibitions that he expected to experience.

Table 3.25. Creating a performance ‘persona’

I went to Butlin’s every year, and when I was ten years old, somebody came up to me and said ‘You should go into the talent competition’, but I just *didn’t* have the nerve, because I was, and still am, a very shy person. *Then* I couldn’t do it – now I do it just like that [clicks fingers]. I turn into somebody else when I go on stage. **FG3.B.74**

Peter Sellers [...] always said he couldn’t play himself in a film. He just created a persona. And every time I’ve gone on stage, I’ve just created somebody who’s not [me]. **FG3.B.74**

S8 (Table 3.26) reported observations of the charismatic effect that adopting such a stage persona can have, whilst recognising that the confident outside shell may sometimes conceal a nervous interior.

Table 3.26. ‘Charisma’

I think the confidence is portrayed in the performance [...] They know what they can do is good, ‘cause the confidence is there, therefore...I’m not saying they’re like that when they come off the stage, but when they’re on the stage they have this persona, this charisma that actually portrays somebody that knows what they’re doing, is good at what they do. [...] (Soprano’s) a prime example of that, when she performs. *Inside* she might be nervous, and I’m sure she is, but coming across to the footlights, she’s not. **S8.41**

This charisma or presence seems to be partly attributed to the singer’s knowledge that they can perform well (Table 3.26), as well as to their ability to hide any anxieties they may have. The interpretation of confidence as a facade was continued by several participants (Table 3.27).

Table 3.27. ‘Bravado’

Maybe some of it is bravado. I think you’ve got to have a certain amount of bravado to stand up there. I don’t think anybody would go on stage thinking ‘Oh, I’m crap. I’m not going to do this. I’m rubbish’. They’re there, and they’ll say ‘Well, this is me. This is what I do. Take it or leave it. If you enjoy it, stay, and if you don’t enjoy it, it’s your problem not mine’. **S12.16**

You watch these programmes about these comedians and it’s... [...] People think they’re lively and funny, and full of beans, outside of their stage act, that they’re the same, but you’re not, you know. **S6.53-54**

Several singers (Table 3.25-3.37) suggested that, for some individuals the appearance of confidence can be almost as important as genuine confidence in a

number of performance scenarios. Participants' descriptions of confidence in terms of posture, appearance, presentation and stage persona included some imaginative depictions of confidence as a metaphorical item of clothing that performers may decide to 'wear'. Interviewees talked in terms of donning a 'mask' of confidence (FG1.E.12), or wearing a 'stage hat' (FG1.K.31) as a metaphor for giving the impression of self-confidence. S10 (Table 3.28) was very clear that confidence often has to be faked in performance situations, and likened this to putting on a costume or 'cloak'.

Table 3.28. A 'cloak' of confidence

I have to fake confidence in a lot of scenarios, and it's the cloak they put on just before they do it. 'Cause you can be a wreck just before you go on, or whatever, before you do something, but you think 'OK. Confidence hat goes on!' It's like Beyonce's Sasha Fierce, or whatever she calls her. **S10.19**

S10 (Table 3.29) elaborated on her suggestion that even world-famous superstars have their own ways of putting on their performance persona and that, in some cases, this almost seems to have become a separate part of their personality. These personifications of confidence can, in extreme cases, act as a more adventurous alter ego which enables performers to adopt onstage behaviour which contrasts with their everyday life.

Table 3.29. It even has a name!

Researcher: You mentioned Beyonce. Tell me about the Sasha Fierce thing, 'cause I don't know about that.
S10: Well, ordinarily she's Beyonce, and then just before she goes on stage, it's like she goes 'Bring it! I've got to give a performance'. So it's not her, it's Sasha Fierce, and *she* goes on stage, and *she* does all the wild things, and then belts it out and dances around, does all of that. And then she comes off stage and she's Beyonce again [...]
Researcher: That's brilliant. So she's got her stage persona, that's even got a name.
S10: Yeah. She's named her. **S10.19**

Cultivating the appearance of confidence was seen as part of creating an identity as an effective performer (Tables 3.22 and 3.30), whether the confidence is

genuine or a facade. Several participants suggested ‘looking like you know what you are doing, even if you don’t’ (FG1.K.41) as a possible strategy for creating confident performances.

Table 3.30. It’s ‘actually about what you look like’

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| <p>There are people that I know that <i>are</i> confident singers. However, when they are in a situation where they’re not confident, they look like they’re being confident [...]which is <i>good</i>, ‘cause obviously a lot of how people in the audience perceive things is actually about what you look like – it’s not actually by you personally...what noise you’re making [laughs]. You can cover a hell of a lot up just by looking like you know what you’re doing. S3.12</p> |
|---|

3.2.6. Confidence in Conductors

The theme of confident-*seeming* performances which can engender confidence was extended to the participants’ consideration of the role of the conductor in contributing to choral self-efficacy (Table 3.31). The conductor’s ability to convey confidence was seen as a key factor in bolstering the confidence of the choir, creating a further ‘virtuous circle’ (see Table 3.13) of perceived confidence, improved performance, enhanced task mastery, and self-efficacy.

Table 3.31. Inspiring confidence

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| <p>If they’re confident, it’s bound to make you feel confident. It inspires you, doesn’t it? That’s what I think anyway. S11.36</p> |
| <p>They’ve got to have the sort of personality that, when I get on that stage, they look relaxed, and confident. S1.34</p> |

S16 (Table 3.32) introduced the negative effects on choral confidence that can occur when a conductor appears to be lacking in self-assurance.

Table 3.32. His first time?

S16: I just got the impression it was the first time he'd done an adult operetta, and therefore he was feeling his way. And other people were feeling their way around him. So probably his appearance of being uncertain decreased people's confidence.
S16.14

Several other participants referred to the impact on individual and collective confidence if a conductor is perceived as nervous or anxious (Table 3.33). S1 was most emphatic about the adverse effects of visible nervousness, if displayed by a conductor, whilst S2 acknowledged that the demands of multitasking inherent in conducting a live performance may occasionally affect a musical director's concentration and self-assurance.

Table 3.33. Nervous conductors

If I had somebody that was doing this [shaking] that would not give me a lot of confidence [...] I'd be a nervous wreck! [laughs] There's no way I could sing in a choir with somebody like that. If they're fine at rehearsals and then they're a quivering wreck, or slightly nervous – NO! – I couldn't cope with that. I have to have somebody in front of me that is confident - that if we fall apart, or something happens, you will bring us back together again. **S1.34-35**

Probably nervousness on their part. They've got the band to think about – not just the piano – so they've got two things to think about, not just the one, so...Just bringing you in and whatever. That's when you lose a few entries, perhaps. Also helps if they smile as well. **S2.32**

Like other participants (Tables 3.3-3.6), S2 (Table 3.33) emphasised the importance of positive facial expressions, with particular reference to conductors. S6 (Table 3.34) pointed out that a nervous appearance can very easily be communicated to the choir, and that this can have an adverse effect on morale. In contrast with S16 (Table 3.32), who was concerned about the possible inexperience indicated by his conductor's apparent lack of confidence, S6 suggested that a conductor's own nervousness can be in evidence despite extensive experience, and that this can be equally contagious and distracting for the singers.

Table 3.34. Infectiousness of conductor's nerves

I like them to be calm. And I think sometimes I've noticed [conductor] gets a bit nervous sometimes. And I've thought 'God, he's done so *much*, and yet he still gets...You see the nerves'. Especially if it's a very important occasion. And I think sometimes we pick that up [...] So we're quite tense as well, and then it's sort of a vicious circle of winding each other up! [laughs] [...] We feel that for [the conductor], and feel it for ourselves as well. **S6.40**

3.2.7. Emotional Contagion and Confidence

The transmission of performance 'nerves' between singers was described as reducing the confidence of individuals, and as adversely affecting the choir as a whole. S1 described the 'infectiousness' of singers' anxieties about particular aspects of a performance, and contrasted this with her personal mode of dealing with the problem on a subsequent occasion (Table 3.35).

Table 3.35. Combating negative emotional contagion

S1: I was sat next to somebody who had their folder open, was going over the words, and was *asking me* if I knew the words, and they didn't *know* the words, so the more I thought about it, and the more *they* were getting worked up, the more *I* got worked up!

Researcher: So they were nervous as well?

S1: Yes. Initially more than me! I was quite calm at that point [laughs]. It was a nightmare. It really was. I think I needed drink after that. I *know* I needed a drink after that! **S1.4**

I didn't talk about it. I didn't talk about the songs we were doing from memory with anybody else. I kept myself...I chatted, but I kept myself very controlled and quiet on Saturday, and I didn't let anybody talk to me about...*Certain* people talked to me about the fact we were doing it from memory. I kept away from *them*, as you probably noticed, and I just...within me I was controlling going up and doing it. I had to do it. I knew I had to do it. **S1.4**

This emotional contagion (Falkenberg et al., 2008) between singers demonstrates that the 'chameleon effect' (Chartrand and Bargh, 1999) operates on an inter-singer basis (Tables 3.35 and 3.36) within amateur choirs, as well as in the conductor-singer dyad. (Tables 3.31-3.34).

Table 3.36. An ‘aura of nervousness’

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| If you get somebody that you <i>know</i> is <i>not</i> ...when they get into an actual performance situation, they seem to get <i>really</i> outwardly nervous. It actually bounces off everybody, and before you actually then start singing, everyone’s on tenterhooks. And they weren’t previously. They were quite relaxed and calm. But they <i>feed</i> off the energies of these people that <i>are</i> nervous. And you find yourself getting nervous when you weren’t before! And you think, ‘Why am I doing this?!’ S3.5 |
| [Soprano’s] just terrified! I mean, standing next to her in concerts is a nightmare ‘cause you can feel it off her – it’s like palpable! This <i>aura</i> round her of nervousness. S3.44 |
| I think their confidence level must affect yours, ‘cause if they’re not confident, they’ll waver in their singing, and if they’re wavering then it makes me waver. S4.25 |

In the data presented so far, the participants have shown an awareness of their physical performing state, and some of the physiological, psychological and emotional connections with this. They have also demonstrated some insight into how singers’ physical manifestations of confidence levels might interact with the feelings, perceptions and experiences of other choir members around them. The main questions arising from all of this include: How might singers be encouraged to appear more confident? Are they already aware of some approaches to this? What might help them to give the impression of confidence and, as a result, eventually to feel more confident? The answers to some of these questions will become apparent from the data presented in the following section.

3.2.8. Keeping up Appearances

As already seen, many singers viewed preparation as an important component in freeing the singer to communicate expressively with the audience, and to become immersed in the interpretation of the music, which can have confidence building effects. For all three focus groups, and twelve of the sixteen individual interviewees, the concept of preparation extended beyond learning the music to other, more practical, aspects of public appearance. Priority was given to being able to prepare in

terms of presentation and appearance, which strongly relates to the feeling that the appearance of confidence is essential to an artistically convincing performance, even if this impression of confidence is not necessarily genuine. Attention to details such as, choir position, entries and exits into the performance area, choir uniform, hair, jewellery, make-up, folders etc. were all felt to add to the sense of confidence that can be derived from effective personal and collective presentation. For some singers, these aspects of preparation were described as having a ritualistic quality, and feelings of confidence were ascribed to the completion of their pre-performance routines.

The data presented in this section were generated in response to the question ‘What do you do to help to increase your confidence before or during a performance?’ (See Appendix 10). S1 (Table 3.37) gave a vivid description of her personal preparation and the importance of feeling that she will ‘look right’, whilst S14 imagined the negative consequences of not achieving the ‘right’ appearance.

Table 3.37. ‘I’ve got to look right’

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| In my mind, I have to be totally regimented [...] and it’s a routine of gotta be there on time, I’ve got to <i>look</i> right, so I’ve got my uniform, and that’s all in one place so I’m not scratching around trying to find the earrings or the necklace, so that’s all in one place. Make-up, hair, everything – and then I’m ready. S1.53 |
| I think your own personal appearance counts for a lot. I <i>know</i> , when I’ve got my performance outfit on, and ready, I think ‘Yes, I’m fine’. If I had to go on in any old, rough clothes, because something had happened, and I had to sing, and I wasn’t properly dressed, I would feel very unconfident, because I’d feel as though I was picking myself out for people to say ‘Ooh, look at her!’ S14.24 |

Male singers were equally emphatic about this aspect of preparing for performance, and about the boost that this attention to their appearance can give to their confidence (Table 3.38).

Table 3.38. 'If you look good that helps'

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| You've got to feel confident that you look right as well [...] in the choir, if you're all dressed the same, like in a uniform, it looks <i>brilliant</i> , when you've got a choir all wearing the same outfit. So I suppose that's a sort of first impression. People sum a lot up with first impressions, and if you <i>look</i> good that helps. It helps your confidence. S12.25 |
| You go and say to somebody 'What did you think?' And they'll say 'Oh, yeah. And you all looked really smart too'. And it makes you think 'Ooh, yeah'. 'Cause I think it looks good. It looks really good. I know [evening dress] is a bit sort of traditional, but it looks good. S6.8-9 |
| I enjoy the concerts. I really do. I enjoy dressing up, when I put the bow tie on – I really do. And I enjoy doing a good job. It's as simple as that, really. S8.62 |

S6 (Table 3.38) described the positive feeling derived from knowing that the audience appreciates the effort that went into looking smart, and all three of these male participants alluded to the confidence-building effect of knowing that they look good. S6 was also specific about the importance of feeling comfortable in choir uniform (Table 3.39), so that there are no distractions from giving the best possible performance.

Table 3.39. 'The princess and the pea'

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| I'm tending to focus on one narrow aspect, that is the comfort [...] Maybe I'm like the princess and the pea – maybe I'm a bit too sensitive about these things [laughs]. I even like to feel right in the suit that I've got. I don't like...Well, nobody likes being too hot or too cold. As long as you feel good about it, I think you give a better performance. S6.8 |
|---|

Some singers had idiosyncratic preferences for their appearance when performing, including wearing particular jewellery or other accessories. S11 (Table 3.40) described favouring a certain pair of spectacles, to an almost superstitious extent, which may be seen as part of his ritualisation of this aspect of performance. His preference seems to be connected to a feeling of security derived from the familiarity of wearing an older pair of glasses, rather than wearing the more functional, recent prescription.

Table 3.40. 'The wrong glasses'

S11: I tend to wear a different pair of glasses. [laughs] Does that sound terrible? These are my latest ones. I have got a pair...and I don't know why, but I just feel more confident singing in them.

Researcher: Is that about the vision, or the way they look on you, or feel?

S11: I don't know [laughs]. Probably. It's something up here [taps head] really!

Researcher: So they're your performing glasses?

S11: I just feel happier if I've got them on. If I haven't got them on I think 'Oh my God, I've got my wrong glasses on!' [laughs] It's silly, isn't it?! **S11.44**

The singers' awareness of needing to look their best, and to feel comfortable, extended to an analogy with theatrical stage performances (Table 3.41). It was felt that all of the components of appearance, including dress and personal grooming, were an integral part of stepping into the role of 'choral singer' for the performance. This may have the effect of distancing the individual from their everyday life, and focusing their concentration on the task of singing to the best of their ability, so that confidence can be derived from the resultant sense of 'task mastery.' It can also be related to earlier comments (Tables 3.22-3.24) about 'putting on a different face' and 'hiding behind a part' during performance. For S6 (Table 3.41), looking the part is an important step towards playing the role of 'choral singer' well. For him, the uniform appearance of the choir adds to the sense of belonging and cohesion, which is also likely to have a positive effect on collective confidence.

Table 3.41. 'Being in character'

Obviously, if we're all wearing a uniform, and you do your hair, and you do your...It's like going on stage really. I know nobody's looking at *me*, but you do those preparation things. You don't roll up looking any old how! **S15.28**

When you're stood up for a choir performance, if you're dressed nicely, and you've got all your music, and you've got all your folders all the right colour, and the same, that's a little bit like being in character, isn't it?...When you're in the suit, you *feel* like you're in a choir, sort of thing. And the same with the male voice choir, we dress in lounge suits, but...It's getting the feeling right. Even the fact that I clean my shoes [...] I always think if you *look* the part, you'll *be* the part, to some extent. **S6.55**

The impact of physical appearance on feelings of confidence and cohesion extended from individual preparation to factors influencing the presentation of the choir as a whole. This, for some singers, went beyond the simple matter of wearing the correct 'uniform' to other aesthetic considerations, such as having matching folders (Table 3.41), and keeping a tidy performance area (Table 3.42).

Table 3.42. Looking 'sloppy'

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| What [conductor] said about water bottles [on stage], I agree entirely with that. I think it looks sloppy, and I think some people stand there with it like a dummy. I hate it! It drives me mad. And I think it's almost like a comfort blanket for some. It's not really that they need a drink. To me, it's all about the look. If you look right and feel right, and you don't have bloomin' bags under your feet, and bottles everywhere...[laughs]... I think if you look right and feel right it helps. S6.61-62 |
|--|

3.2.9. Physical Presentation of the Choir

Inattention to the physical presentation of the ensemble, was widely felt to be to the detriment of the performance. Aspects of choral presentation included posture and deportment, the position of the choir with the venue, and the placement of individual singers within the choir. S3 suggested that dealing with this, so that singers feel that they look 'right' and feel comfortable, is an important part of building the confidence of the choir (Table 3.43). She provided contrasting examples of experiences of performing in relation to collective presentation, and the effects on confidence.

Table 3.43. *Where and how to stand*

I think some attention...I think that would give people more confidence – that you go on, you mean business, you know where you should be standing and *how* you should be standing [...] You go on stage, you have time to organise yourself, prepare yourself. Are you standing right? Are you standing in the right formation? Has everybody got enough space? Rather than all huddling up like this [hunches shoulders] and folders like that [demonstrates holding music tightly to the body]. **S3.38**

I think I do get the feeling...and I think it's because we always sit down, we stand up while everybody's looking at you, and it's like got to get into....'Quick, quick!' And I always feel that we're a bit of a rag-tag bunch. We are not organized, we're not...and some of that can help with nerves and confidence because...it makes you feel skittled before you've even started singing. You don't feel prepared. It's a bit like going out to work but you've not got your shirt and tie on, or you've not got your handbag. You're half-cocked. **S3.37**

Two of the male singers elaborated on this theme (Table 3.44), giving different examples of the effects of 'discipline' and, conversely, lack of planning and organisation on the appearance of the choir as a whole. Bearing in mind S3's comments (Table 3.43) on feeling 'skittled' (or discombobulated) before the singing starts, this can clearly have an impact on the singers' sense of being adequately prepared, and therefore is pertinent to confident performance.

Table 3.44. *'Huddling' and 'scrambling'*

It was quite a huddle last time we went, and this time I thought it was much better organised. [...] Sometimes I think 'Why didn't somebody have a look at this before, and work this out?' [laughs] You wouldn't go charging on to the stage in Act One of a musical without having done a lot of preparation, and a tech rehearsal, and you know where everything is. And sometimes, with the male voice choir, we've gone on to repeat venues, and we maybe do a different format, I've thought 'Why don't we spend a little bit of time – get there a bit earlier – and work out something that everyone's happy with?' **S6.7-8**

There was a lot of discipline there, in that male voice choir. But I thought there was a bit of that on Saturday [...] When we came off, we came off in a line. So I quite like that disciplined side of it, without it being too OTT, rather than just strolling on. I saw [community choir] doing it at the Baptist Church [...] and it looked *awful*. They just came in from the sides, and they were just scrambling on the stage, and whatever. And I think [male voice choir] did the same. And I thought 'Well, this doesn't look right to me'. So a little bit of organisation, discipline-wise, leading up to the standing. **S8.61-62**

For these choral singers, this aspect of preparation became even more significant in more complex performance situations, such as the ‘logistical nightmare’ (S3.38) of joint performances with other ensembles. Focus Group 2 talked at length (Table 3.45) about rehearsing physical entries and exits, the problems of being located differently due to the size and shape of performance venues, and the need to be able to trust other singers to remember their positions and movements in relation to their fellow performers. For some participants, these extra-musical concerns seemed to take precedence over music-related considerations, and lack of attention to these details created an unwelcome distraction. Limited opportunities to rehearse in the concert venue were seen as compounding the confidence issues relating to some of these practicalities.

Table 3.45. ‘Are we going on or off?’

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| <p>So I know I need to be here at this time, and I need to be there quickly, but there’s four people standing there, going ‘Oh, are we going on or off?’ Then I feel really tense about it, ‘cause I think it looks awful [...] It’s not the singing that’s worrying me – it’s where on stage, you know...And we all feel comfortable in certain positions so, if you can’t get into the position you normally stand in, that can be a bit upsetting. FG2.K.45</p> |
| <p>FG2.K: I think we should be fairly confident about what we’re singing by the time we reach a performance, but what we’re not confident about is actually getting on the stage, getting off the stage, and actually [having] time in the venue, which is impossible to correct, you know.</p> <p>Researcher: You might get one chance, mightn’t you?</p> <p>All: Yes.</p> <p>FG2.K: You’ve had a brief rehearsal in the afternoon, and you’ve seen where you’re going to be standing, but you’ve never actually done it, so it’s a bit...</p> <p>FG2.B: Daunting.</p> <p>FG2.K: Yes, daunting. And there’s not very many of us, so if it’s just [choir], and there’s fifteen of us on the stage, it doesn’t take a lot of sorting out, but when we share the stage with other choirs there’s quite a lot of people coming and going, and you just feel it could go horribly wrong, or it could look a mess. I always feel that there’s an audience out there who’ve paid money. FG2.46</p> |

Words such as ‘upsetting’, ‘daunting’ and ‘worrying’ indicate the emotional impact of the insecurity that can arise from these logistical challenges, especially if insufficient preparation has taken place. These singers also have a clear sense of responsibility to their audience, and part of their concern derives from not wishing to present their paying customers with a ‘mess’ or something that has gone ‘horribly wrong’. This awareness of the significance of extra-musical influences, including appearance and physical presentation, as a factor in audience evaluation, extends the findings of research on the formal assessment of vocal performance in educational settings and professional environments (Coimbra et al., 2001; Griffiths, 2010; Howard, 2012; Wapnick et al., 1997, 1998, 2000), and demonstrates the importance of these factors in the world of amateur choral singing.

Some of these emergent themes relate to choir position, performance venues, acoustics and preparation for singing in different spaces, as well as to physical manifestations of confidence, and will be developed in more detail in Chapter 4. For the moment, S13 (Table 3.46) provides an epigrammatic précis of some of the findings presented so far.

Table 3.46. Clothes and brogues

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| <p>How you go on stage, and whether you’ve got music covers, and what you’re wearing, and all that stuff. Oh, the [chamber choir] spend hours...The women go ‘What are we going to wear?’ [laughs] ‘Clothes!’ Actually it was a big step forward when [previous conductor] managed to get the women not to wear their brogues! S13.35</p> |
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3. 3 THEMATIC SUMMARY

The superordinate theme addressed in this chapter relates to physical and interpretative aspects of confident choral appearance (see Figure 5). The majority of participants defined confident performance in terms of non-verbal communication (NVC), and related this to body language, including poise, upright and open posture, and relaxed demeanour. Positive facial expressions, particularly smiling and eye contact between the performers and the audience, were also seen as signs of confidence.

Audience interaction and engagement, were seen not only as indications of confidence but also as ways of building confidence in performers, as several participants described feeling more confident as a result of becoming immersed in the music and enjoying the occasion. It was, however, widely acknowledged that the level of focus and absorption that enabled expressive performance and personal enjoyment of the event are only possible once all aspects of the choral event are thoroughly prepared. These elements include attending to the physical presentation and deportment of the choir and the personal appearance of the individual, as well as to musical, expressive and interpretative components.

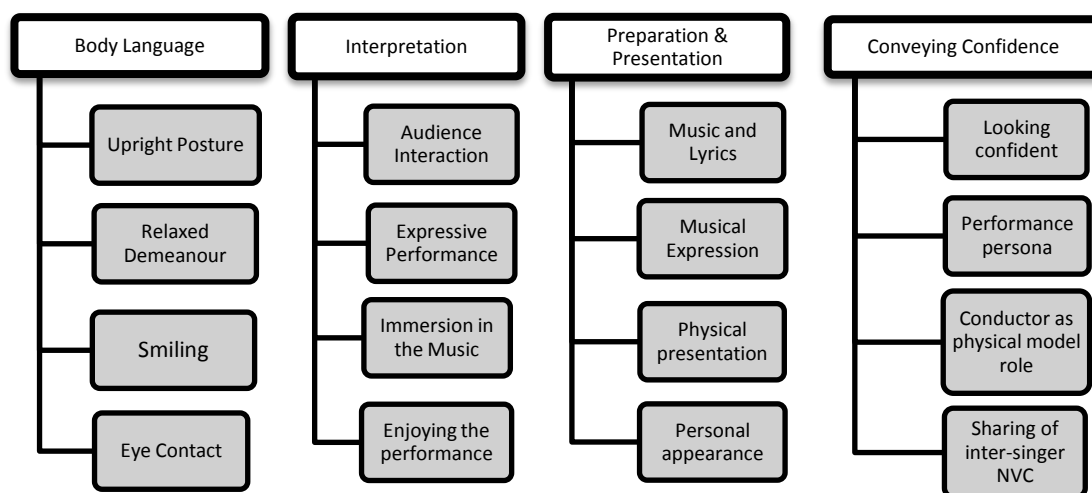
Amongst the participants there was widespread speculation that confident stage 'presence' may not always be based on genuine confidence, and that the appearance of confidence may be created by attention to physical and expressive details of the performance. The adoption of a 'performance persona' to assist with creating a confident-looking performance was discussed, and the idea that adopting the appearance and body language demonstrated by performers who are perceived as

confident may, in itself, instil a subjective sense of confidence with the individual singer.

The 'contagious' effect (both physically and emotionally) of open postures and positive facial expression was also noted by many participants. The reciprocal effect of body language between singer and audience, singer and conductor and from singer to singer were all seen as having a significant effect upon confidence levels.

These themes will be discussed in more detail, and with reference to some of the relevant literature, in the following section.

Figure 5. The role of NVC (non-verbal communication) in confident choral performance



3. 4. DISCUSSION

3.4.1. Physical Presentation, Expression and Immersion in Performance

When asked to describe confident singers, the majority of participants raised various aspects of the subject of appearance, which was therefore identified as one of the superordinate emergent themes. Related subordinate themes included body language and posture; communication with the audience; expressive interpretation of lyrics and music; the physical appearance and presentation of the choir; and the role that preparation plays in all of these factors. The definition of a confident performer, for many participants was based on the physical embodiment of positive affect, including positive body language, expressive non-verbal communication, eye contact and engagement with the audience, and other interpretative dimensions of the performance. Some participants also described ameliorating their own concerns about self-confidence by immersing themselves in the performance, becoming absorbed in the music, becoming involved with the emotional interpretation, or simply enjoying the sense of occasion. This absorption in an activity is characteristic of achieving a state of 'flow', which has been defined as follows:

A sense that one's skills are adequate to cope with the challenges at hand, in a goal-directed, rule-bound action system that provides clear clues as to how well one is performing. Concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant, or to worry about problems. Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002: 71)

A sense of total immersion, to the exclusion of all distractions, and to the extent that any sense of self-consciousness is lost, means that achieving flow conditions in musical performance may account for the singers' sense of

increased confidence when participation in the performance is all-absorbing. This immersion was also credited, by the participants, with helping to create the appearance of confidence in expressive performances by singers they had observed. Several participants made the obvious but salient point that, in order to become absorbed in enjoying the performance, and in interpreting and expressing the music confidently, thorough preparation is necessary. Without sufficient grounding in all of the technical and musical aspects of performance, total immersion in the occasion and the music is difficult to achieve. Some participants also related confident, enjoyable choral performances to repertoire that is challenging enough to engage their interest, whilst being sufficiently well prepared and familiar to allow a competent, assured performance.

Many participants felt that, as part of their preparation for performance, having time to attend to their appearance - which included finding the 'right' clothes and jewellery; wearing some kind of choir 'uniform'; attending to hair and make-up; having matching folders; or even wearing the 'right glasses' - all helped with their confidence when performing. For some singers this was described as becoming part of a pre-performance ritual which can help to build confidence. This extends some of the relevant findings of sports-related research (Bleak and Frederick, 1998; Foster et al., 2006), and demonstrates that this aspect of performance preparation is similarly important for confidence-building amongst amateur choral singers.

Feeling comfortable and well presented was felt to help singers to concentrate on performing well, which helped to improve performance, with consequent positive effects on task mastery and perceived efficacy. Extraneous distractions, such as concerns about the appearance or comfort of choir uniform, are likely to interfere with

the likelihood of achieving flow conditions, and a reduction in the associated benefits of positive affect and increased confidence. Rehearsing their entries to and exits from the performing area, and how and where they would be standing, also contributed to singers' feelings of confidence in performance. Lack of opportunity to acclimatise to the concert venue and practical aspects of the performance often led to unwelcome distractions, such as concerns about getting on and off the stage. This is, again, likely to inhibit 'flow' and affect confidence levels.

3.4.2. Extra-musical Factors: Physical Presentation and Preparation

Bearing in mind the fact that the quality of a performance is often assessed on the basis of extra-musical aspects, particularly the singer's physical appearance (Griffiths, 2010; Howard, 2012; Wapnick et al., 1997, 1998, 2000), performers are right to give these matters due consideration. Amateur choral singers seem to have an instinctive sense that this is the case, even if they do not always express it directly in terms of the effect that these factors may have on an audience's evaluation of their performance. The participants in the current study tended to express this in terms of their feelings of enhanced confidence if they know they 'look right', and that conforming to the social, cultural and musical mores of formal choral performance provides a favourable level of personal comfort (Asch, 1955). There is a clear sense that this level of preparation and presentation lifts their mood and enables them to perform more effectively. The resultant enhanced sense of task mastery is then linked to a further increase in positive affect, including perceptions of self-efficacy.

Participants in previous studies have expressed an awareness of extra-musical factors influencing the assessments of their performances (Coimbra et al., 2001; Howard, 2012). The current study demonstrates that amateur choral singers share this insight with their counterparts in educational and professional settings. However, the current participants extend the knowledge that appearance and presentation affect the observer's evaluation of performance quality, into a perception that a confident-seeming, competent appearance can actually affect their confidence levels. They show an awareness that a sense of task mastery or competence based on a positive reaction from the audience, even if partly based on appearance rather than on purely musical factors, is likely to enhance collective self-efficacy, which in itself will improve performance, and lead to increased confidence.

Studies of ritualistic pre-performance behaviour in sport have shown that some players attach a superstitious significance to their preparation routines (Foster and Wiegand, 2006). Adhering to these routines can increase players' sense of control over challenging situations (Bleak and Frederick, 1998), and help them to deal with stress and anxiety (Womack, 1992). For many of the choral singers in this study, their pre-performance rituals tend to centre on attending to their appearance, including their choir 'uniform', and make-up where applicable. This concern with appearance extends to the general presentation of the choir, including how and where they are standing; posture, body language and facial expression; non-verbal communication amongst the singers, between the choir and conductor, and with the audience; and physical aspects of musical interpretation and delivery. All of these elements were seen as integral to developing a confident appearance, which can, in turn, help to build a confident performance. The participants' emphasis on the significance of appearance-related

factors is likely to be connected to their enculturation into the social and cultural norms of performance etiquette (Davidson, 1997), along with an instinctive awareness that extra-musical judgements by audiences are inevitable, as well as the inherent sense of self-confidence that can derive, for some people, simply from the knowledge that they are looking their best.

3.4.3. The Relationship between Looking and Feeling Confident

The contribution of appearance and body language to conveying confidence is presumably, for amateur singers, partly based on common sense and their observations of other performers. Their instinctive sense of this is well founded, as it has been suggested that posture and its associated non-verbal messages are universally understood, and that bodily posture may be seen as a more genuine expression of emotional and psychological state, compared with individual gestures which can more easily be superimposed (Wilson, 1994).

As physical posture and facial expression can produce as well as reflect positive affect (Carney et al., 2010; Ekman et al., 1983, 1991 and 1990 cited in Ekman, 1992; Strack et al., 1988), it has been suggested that, by altering posture and expression, an individual can prepare him or herself physiologically and psychologically to cope with challenging circumstances. The ability to ‘fake it ‘til they make it’ may actually enhance confidence as well as performance quality in risk-taking or stressful situations, such as public speaking or job interviews (Carney et al., 2010: 1,367). The participants in the current study felt this was the case for vocal performance, and that a confident posture indicated confidence from singers, whether or not it was genuinely experienced by the individual concerned. It was also felt that the adoption of a

confident posture could help to imbue amateur choral singers with a sense of confidence.

A recurrent theme in the current study was derived from the question, posed by several participants, of whether or not confident-seeming singers were genuinely self-confident. There was speculation, along with some anecdotal evidence, that some of the performers who appear more self-assured are simply better able to conceal their anxieties, and don a metaphorical 'cloak of confidence'. It was also felt that the ability to adopt a confident-looking 'performance persona' could help to convince the singer, as well as the audience, of their own efficacy for choral singing. A relationship has previously been found between assuming the open and expansive postures associated with power and authority, and the subjective experience of relative power for the individuals adopting such postures (Carney et al., 2005; Carney et al., 2010). The experience of power has a number of beneficial effects, including a reduction in cortisone (stress hormone) levels (Abbott et al., 2003, Coe et al., 1979, and Sapolsky et al., 1997, cited by Carney et al., 2010: 1,364). 'Power postures', even when not indicative of genuine dominance, can have a similar impact on physiology, behaviour, psychology, and subjective affect, including:

Elevation of the dominance hormone testosterone, reduction of the stress hormone cortisol, and increases in behaviorally demonstrated risk tolerance and feelings of power. (Carney et al., 2010: 1,366)

As well as considering the effects of posture during performance, incorporating positive postural practice into the preparation for a performance may be beneficial, as adjusting one's non-verbal behaviour prior to an evaluative social situation can help the individual to prepare psychologically and emotionally for the exigencies of the event. Preparatory power posing is an effective 'performance boosting tool' even

when the observers or audience have not seen the preparatory non-verbal behavioural displays (Cuddy et al., 2012: 2). Attending to posture and facial expression immediately before a choral performance, as well as during the event, may have several positive effects. Firstly, it is likely to enhance the singers' subjective perception of self-confidence as well as their appearance of confidence. Secondly, it may also improve their performance, which will enhance their impression of their own level of task mastery, and therefore add to their feelings of confidence. Thirdly, it may give the impression of the elusive quality of 'stage presence' during performance (Cuddy et al., 2012).

3.4.4. Physical Role Models: Conductors and Fellow Singers

My findings demonstrate that amateur choral singers' confidence levels may be affected by the conductor's body language, as well as by emotional contagion (Falkenberg et al., 2008) between fellow choir members. Confidence boosting 'power postures' (Carney et al., 2010), if convincingly modelled by the conductor, will be reciprocated by the choir. The 'chameleon effect' (Chartrand and Bargh, 1999) then ensures that the beneficial results of assuming positive body language are shared amongst the singers. The participants in this study also described positive facial expressions as playing a helpful role in encouraging positive affect between the singers and the conductor, as well as amongst the singers who were able to make eye contact with each other during choral performances. Based on these findings, positive facial feedback, and the adoption of a confident demeanour, can contribute to perceptions of increased self-confidence and improvements in performance quality, both of which interact to enhance self-efficacy for choral singing.

On the subject of smiling whilst singing, a brief caveat may be advisable. Although a genuine Duchenne smile (Ekman et al., 1990), is the most infectious positive facial expression (Messinger et al., 1999; Gutman, 2011), exaggerating the lateral and upwards movement of the zygomatic major (which lifts and stretches the lips) may not always optimise vocal tone. Pulling the lips back into a wide smile can ‘overbrighten’ the voice (McKinney, 1994: 161), whilst too much lateral lip movement at higher pitches can result in ‘shrillness’ (Miller, 1996: 14). Furthermore, a bright smile may not always be appropriate to the repertoire or mood of the song. The definitive characteristic of a Duchenne smile is the contraction of the orbicularis oculi, pars lateral (raising the cheek muscles under the eyes), and this will often be sufficient to brighten the tone whilst simultaneously softening the facial expression to provide an impression of general positive affect. The use of preparatory power postures to enhance performance could also be accompanied by preparatory smiling to encourage positive facial feedback responses amongst the performers.

The new findings in this chapter, regarding the role of non-verbal communication and physical presentation in choral confidence, relate to Bandura’s (1982) suggestion that counteracting physical manifestations of low confidence by assuming positive body language can alter physiological and emotional feedback regarding the arousal state, and can therefore increase the individual’s sense of self-efficacy. My study has demonstrated that this is of paramount importance in the sphere of amateur choral performance and, as discussed, has practical implications for physical preparation in rehearsals, and for postural and expressive modelling (by conductors as well as singers) in performance. The participants’ emphasis on posture may also, to some extent, explain the reported use of the Alexander Technique (a system of aligning

bodily posture to maximise clavicular and thoracic relaxation, chest expansion and tension-free vocal production) amongst some musicians as a successful strategy in the management of music performance anxiety (Valentine, 1991, 2004). The posture and deportment achieved by students of this technique have clear parallels with the body language used in power postures (Carney et al., 2010), and may help to confer a sense of increased self-confidence within the performer.

The importance, for the participants in this study, of factors related to presentation, appearance, body language and posture is likely to be connected with singers' subjective experience of themselves as an embodied instrument. The voice is an integral part of their physiology and their performance is inextricably linked with their physique and neuropsychobiological condition (Thurman and Welch, 2000). This complex relationship between the singer, their 'instrument' and their feelings about performance, combined with the fact that they have no external instrument to physically separate them from the audience or 'towards which they can project their feelings and attention' (Coimbra et al., 2001:15), can lead to an intense focus on personal, appearance-related aspects of performance. These factors may partly explain the emphasis placed upon body language, grooming and physical presentation, during the current study, and suggest that issues related to appearance and presentation may, arguably, have more of an impact on confidence among singers than they might upon other instrumentalists.

The beneficial effects of emotional contagion between amateur singers, when reciprocally modelling positive body language and sharing the enjoyment of performing, may be affected by practicalities such as choir layout and position, due to the singers' need to see each other in order to receive the necessary non-verbal

feedback from their peers, as well as from the conductor. Some of these aspects of choral performance will be discussed in the following chapter.

4. CHOIR CONFIGURATION

4.1. BACKGROUND

4.1.1. A Working Definition

The term 'choir configuration' will be used in this study to describe the physical layout (or formation) of the choir within the rehearsal room or performance venue. In practical terms, choir formation may vary according to whether the singers are arranged in, for example, a single semicircle, sectional blocks of specific voice parts, or mixed voice arrangements in which no singer is adjacent to another of the same voice part. Further variables relating to the concept of configuration include the spacing or distance between the singers, and voice placement, which refers to the position of individual singers within the choir.

4.1.2. Physical Location

As the vocal instrument is located within and integral to the body of the singer, the voice reacts to the various physiological, neurological and psychological stimuli and processes that are inextricably linked and constantly interacting within the human 'bodymind' during a performance (Thurman and Welch, 2000). Similarly, the singer is located within his or her physical environment and is also physiologically, psychologically and emotionally affected by the conditions of this environment. These situational factors include physical comfort in terms of warmth and light; the humidity or dryness of the atmosphere as an influence on vocal production; the effects of room acoustics, which are principally affected by levels of reverberation or absorbency

(Sundberg, 1987); and the influence of choral acoustics particular to the challenge of 'many people singing together and hearing each other in a room' (Ternström and Karna, 2002: 269).

For many participants in the current study, the interaction between environmental conditions, acoustics, and the position and physical layout of the choir, had an effect upon their perception of their performance, both individually and collectively, and upon their confidence during performance. A brief review of some of the literature related to choral acoustics and choir configuration will therefore be provided as an introduction to the emergent themes in this chapter.

4.1.3. Choral Acoustics

A number of acoustic characteristics of choral singing, some of which may have an impact on the confidence of singers, have previously been identified. By playing a reference tone and asking the singers to sing that tone for as long as it was played, it was established that, 'when the reference tone was very loud and the singers could not hear their own voices, the situation became chaotic' (Sundberg, 1987: 139). The resultant difficulties in pitching accurately may lead to a feeling of insecurity in performance, and affect vocal quality. The importance has therefore been emphasized, for choral singers, of being able to 'hear each other at a reasonable loudness as compared with the level at which they hear their own voices' (p. 140).

Making sense of all of the sensory signals available during a choral performance presents an 'unusual challenge to the auditory system' (Ternström, 1994: 300). The likelihood of successfully meeting the demands of choral performance is largely dependent upon the functioning of the preferred self-to-other ratio (SOR), i.e. the

ratio between the sound pressure level (SPL) of the feedback (the sound of the singer's own voice) and the reference (the sound of the rest of the choir) (p. 293). The SPL of the reference has a direct component, derived from the neighbouring singers in the choir, and a reverberated component, derived from the room reflections of the choir as a whole. The feedback is composed of direct airborne sound (diffracted around the head from mouth to ear), reflected airborne sound (returned to the singer's ears after interacting with the environmental acoustics) and bone-conducted sound, which is heard internally by the singer, and which is independent of room acoustics (p. 294). The interaction of all of these elements of the reference and feedback means that, in choral performances, there are likely to be difficulties in hearing oneself and others accurately. This is likely to have an impact upon the singer's perception of security of intonation and timing, and could be a factor in the context of choral confidence. The emphasis, for Ternström's participants, was on the importance of hearing themselves rather than their fellows, and on the difficulties of achieving their preferred SOR due to the 'masking' effect of neighbouring voices of a similar sound quality (p. 294).

4.1.4. Spacing and Formation

The preferred SOR of individual singers can be affected by a number of variables, including the number of singers in the choir, their individual locations in relation to other singers, their relative vocal output power and the level of room reverberation or absorption (Ternström, 1999). Although singer preferences can vary slightly, and room acoustics can be a complicating factor, individuals generally favour spacing which allows them to hear their own voices amongst the choral blend:

On average one's own voice needs to be about 6dB stronger than the rest of the choir. In most rooms this implies a fairly spread-out formation. (Ternström and Karna, 2002: 269)

The spacing between singers is widely agreed to be the main influence on SOR, with the following specific effects on choral acoustics:

The farther apart the singers are standing (especially from their own section colleagues), the greater the SOR, and the easier it will be for them to hear their own voices – and conversely, the harder it will be for them to hear the others. (p. 273)

The positive impact of wider inter-singer spacing upon the ability of the individual singers to hear their own voices has been confirmed by studies of different spacing between singers when used in various choral formations. When block sectional layouts (arranged in voice parts) were compared with mixed voice configurations, spacing, rather than choir formation, made more difference to auditors' assessments of choral sound (Daugherty, 1999, 2003). Spacing, compared with layout, also had a more marked effect upon the SOR amongst the singers (Daugherty, 1999). The majority of listeners and choristers preferred the sound quality of choral extracts performed with wider spacing between singers, whilst choristers also attributed improvements in vocal production, as well as in the ability to hear themselves and other singers, to 'spread spacing' (p. 224). Ekholm, (2000) suggested that the wider spacing preferred by listeners and singers may be a possible solution to the Lombard effect, i.e. the tendency for choristers to over-sing in response to increased choral volume (Ternström and Sundberg, 1986, cited in Ekholm, 2000: 133). This may partly explain why closer spacing was perceived as being responsible for increased vocal and physical tension, regardless of whether the choir was configured in a synergistic

formation (broadly based on voice compatibility rather than range) or random block formations arranged in voice parts (Daugherty, 2003).

4.1.5. Position and Placement

The practice of voice placement (the positioning of the individual within the choir), based on voice matching systems similar to the above-mentioned synergistic formation, has a long history. For example, Molnar (1950) advocated that choral singers should be 'placed in the section called for by the quality of the voice, with no regard to the range' (p. 48). Molnar categorised voice quality according to timbre, such as 'flute', 'reed' or 'oboe type'. Timbre matching is likely to result in a formation in which voice parts are mixed rather than arranged in vocal sections based on range, such as SATB. A variation upon this type of voice matching, where the singers remained in voice parts, but were individually placed within each range-based section according to tonal compatibility with the singers immediately adjacent to them (defined as an 'acoustic' placement), was compared with the more usual, 'random' sectional seating, based on range (Ekholm, 2000). Independent auditors preferred the 'acoustic' formation, and choristers felt that it improved intonation and choral blend; reduced the temptation to over-sing; and increased the singers' ability to hear themselves and their fellow performers.

Although the pre-eminence of spacing over choir formation or voice placement, in terms of optimising choral sound, is well-established (Daugherty, 1999, 2003), it has been suggested that mixed voice configurations can improve balance and intonation (Lamb, 2010), and choral blend (Daugherty, 1999). There may also be practical reasons for adopting particular formations or voice placement plans, such as physically

foregrounding the male voices when there is a shortage of tenors and basses (Lamb, 2010). Earlier studies similarly claimed that variations in choir formation could be beneficial in relation to practical and stylistic considerations. Lambson (1961) suggested that, whilst the sectional block plan was acoustically advantageous for polyphonic music in four parts or more, this formation posed greater complications during amplified performances and broadcasts, due to microphone placement, and arranging the singers in clusters of SATB quartet sections was favoured when performing four-part homophonic vocal music. This study had some limitations, however, as no statistical procedures were applied to the data, and no feedback was sought from the choristers regarding their perceptions of the different choral formations used.

4.1.6. Asking the Singers

The issue of seeking the opinions of the singers is a pertinent one, particularly if, as in the current study, the researcher is exploring their subjective experiences of performing and their affective response to the performance situation, in addition to their perceptions of performance quality. Ternström (1999) administered a questionnaire to the participants in his study of SOR, but this was mainly limited to questions about the data collection process rather than subjective perceptions of the sound produced and SOR, or the singers' feelings about the performance. In the majority of relevant research, more emphasis has tended to be placed on the opinions of auditors than on those of the choristers. For example, Daugherty (2003) consulted three times as many listeners as choral singers about their preferences related to the sound produced in various formations. Although singers were asked

about ease of vocal production as well as preferred choral sound, and reported 'less vocal tension and better vocal production in spread spacing' (Daugherty, 2003: 48), the principal focus of this study was still on choral sound rather than on subjective experience. Similarly, although Ekholm, (2000) administered a questionnaire to the participating choristers in her study of vocal mode and choral seating, the main emphasis was on overall sound quality rather than the singers' affective response during performance. The number of independent auditors evaluating the sound quality was overwhelming (37 conductors, 33 voice teachers and 32 instrumentalists) compared with the number of singers (22) involved (p. 128), which raises the question of how much priority was given to the opinion of the choristers, compared with that of the listeners.

In an attempt to redress the balance, a study was carried out with the aim of assessing the 'perceptions of the choristers concerning different choral arrangements' as well as making 'acoustic comparisons' (Aspaas et al., 2004: 13). Three formations (block sectional, mixed and sectional in columns) were compared by examining long-term average spectrums (LTAS) and perceptual chorister ratings. In contrast with earlier studies in which the emphasis had been on the ease of hearing oneself over the other singers, the questions posed to the choristers by Aspaas et al. addressed the ease of hearing other sections, the ease of hearing/blending with their section and the ease of maintaining their vocal part, as well as their rating of the choral sound. In order to provide more precise information regarding the interaction between choir formation and preferred SOR, it would have been useful to separate the question regarding hearing and blending with their section into two separate questions. They were also asked about their personal preferences in relation to each of the three

formations but few details about the reasons for these preferences were provided beyond acoustic considerations. Although the empirical data based on LTAS analysis showed no significant differences in acoustic quality related to the various formations, choir members had their own preferences for particular configurations. Some of these preferences varied according to gender, as some of the male singers preferred sectional formations arranged in voice parts. On the whole, however, a preference for mixed voice formations was expressed, due to the increased ease of hearing other vocal parts (p.24).

As previous research in this area has tended to concentrate on the evaluations of listeners rather than singers, the current study has focused on the opinions and perceptions of choir members, in order to gain a closer understanding of their experiences and needs. The remainder of this chapter will therefore consist of an examination of some of the interactions between choral acoustics, choir configuration and spacing, and subjective perceptions of performance quality and self-efficacy, from the point of view of the amateur singer.

4.2. FINDINGS

4.2.1. Hearing Each Other

It's important to me, for my confidence, that I *hear* - that I can hear the other sections. **S8.33-34**

Concerns regarding acoustic factors were spontaneously introduced by many participants, with specific reference to their ability to hear each other and the effect that this can have on their confidence levels during performance. The first references to choir configuration and its effect on the singers' ability to hear their fellows were

spontaneously generated by the second and third focus groups, in response to the general question: ***Are there any particular circumstances in rehearsals or performances that have an effect on your confidence?*** (see Appendix 9). In FG2 (Table 4.1), the layout of the choir was immediately mentioned as a significant factor. FG3.N described the disorientating effect of being unable to hear other singers due to his own particular position within the choir, and the resultant self-criticism relating to his own performance.

Table 4.1. Choir formation, position and hearing the others.

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| <p>FG2.K: I don't like it when we stand in a single row. I feel like you can't hear enough.</p> <p>FG2.B: You want to be able to hear the other parts.</p> <p>[All agree.] FG2.42</p> |
| <p>When we did that thing in the pub, I think I was stuck right at the front, and I think I had some girls behind me, and I was singing it completely wrong! [laughs] It was rubbish. It does affect me who I'm stood next to. And whether I can hear people or not. FG3.N.19</p> |

The importance of hearing the other singers also emerged spontaneously during thirteen of the sixteen individual interviews. Table 4.2. provides summaries of two interviewees' perceptions of the interaction between different room acoustics; performance environments, including the size of the venue and ambient noise; choir formation; being able to hear fellow performers; and the effects of these factors on self-perceptions and confidence during performance.

Table 4.2. Room acoustics, choir position and confidence.

Certainly the dynamics of the hall, in terms of the acoustics and things like that, *do* really affect me and how I *feel* I'm performing. So certain halls that have not got brilliant acoustic capabilities, they seem to make me feel that I can't *hear* what's happening very well. So I don't particularly like that. And I'm not overly confident singing in small, intimate venues like pubs and clubs and things like that... Again, I think it's the acoustics – the fact that I don't seem to be able to hear what anybody else is singing, or what I'm singing. And also, if there's any noise around, it distracts me. **S.3**

It's quite important to be able to hear your colleagues. And if you're in an awkward formation, you know or the sound goes up into the ceiling [gestures upwards], or you can't hear them, then that really does affect...I think it affects your singing and therefore affects your confidence as well. If you can't hear people, then you don't know whether you should be singing it *louder* or whether you need to pipe down, or be quiet, and *try* and listen to them a bit more. So I think the acoustics and the ambience of the place really affects it. **S4.12**

S3 and S4 (Table 4.2) described an emotional response to acoustic factors, including adverse effects on their perception of their performance quality. In common with the majority of participants, both of these singers interpreted acoustic factors as detrimental to the performance when the principal effect is to reduce the audibility of the reference tone from other singers, as this can cause uncertainty about accuracy and intonation. S3 associated room acoustics, which she linked to the size of the venue, and noisy environments with some of the difficulties in hearing other singers, whilst S4 introduced the idea that choir configuration has an influence on the choral singers' ability to hear the reference. He specifically referred to the effect of the position of the choir, as well as the peculiarities of certain room acoustics, on his ability to hear his colleagues, and the effect that this can have on his performance, in terms of dynamic control and confidence.

Being unable to hear the other singers was often directly associated with a dramatic loss of confidence (Table 4.3). S6 and S14 both described room acoustics which had an effect on their ability to hear the rest of the choir. S14 elaborated on the

disconcerting sense of isolation and exposure that this can cause, whilst S6 mentioned position as a factor.

Table 4.3. Hearing each other.

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| If we're not positioned where you can <i>hear</i> people...I've been in quite a few churches especially with the male voice choir, and a couple of times with [chamber choir] where, if you're not in the position that you feel happy with, it can just crumble. S6.4 |
| Places like the [concert Hall]...the sound leaves you and you feel as if you're doing a solo for the whole performance. It's built that way, to go to the audience. Not well at all. Not well. It's a very strange feeling, if you sing there. S14.4 |

S14 recognised that the performers' acoustic needs may be neglected in the design of concert venues, in favour of the aesthetic considerations from the audience's point of view. Her description of feeling as if she was doing a solo, rather than singing in an ensemble, left her feeling insecure and exposed, in a way that she might not have expected within a group performance.

S6 (Table 4.4) gave a graphic account of the choir's reaction to an acoustically adverse situation. Although he commences by referring to the quality of the venue, the pre-eminent consideration is whether the singers can hear each other.

Table 4.4. Venues and morale

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| The venue, to me – and, I think, to a lot of others, is quite...People tend to get a bit niggly, and shift and you know...‘This isn't very good, is it? How are we going to hear that?’ And mutter, mutter, mutter, you know [laughs]. If you don't feel, you know, good karma, it's very rattling. I don't know – maybe we should be more professional than that and sort of deal with whatever we've got, but you just feel that you've done all this work, you've got this all off pat, and then you can't hear the sopranos or whatever. S6.5 |
|--|

S6 expressed a sense of frustration that the choir's meticulous preparation was counteracted by situational factors during the performance. The initial description of 'niggly' singers fidgeting and muttering almost trivialises this singer's concerns about SOR, but it becomes apparent that there are more serious, 'very rattling', effects on

morale, satisfaction and confidence when singers cannot hear each other clearly. His final sentence expresses the disappointment and dissatisfaction that ensues when inadequate vocal feedback from other singers adversely affects their perception of performance quality and their ability to perform confidently.

4.2.2. Closer Intersinger Spacing and Confidence

It's a lot, lot better if we're all close together and can all hear each other... you can hear each other. And that gives you confidence as well. **S2.5**

In response to questions regarding choir formation and individual position within the choir, all focus groups and eleven of the interviewees expressed a preference for standing closer together, as they felt that this made it easier for them to hear the other singers (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5. Squashing up

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|---|
| I hated...It was OK [earlier when the other choir] were there because then we were all squashed up, but [later] I felt there was quite a gap between [fellow alto] and me [...] Where I've got people either side of me that are squashing me, that's when I feel comfortable. S1.14 |
| I'm more comfortable with a more compact configuration, rather than stretched thin [...] I think it's easier to sing with other people. I can hear what's going on, on each side of me, and I can hear the other parts. S15.12 |

The majority of participants consistently expressed the feeling that being in a tight-knit configuration enabled them to hear the other singers more clearly, which helped them to feel confident while performing. Several singers described the uncertainties arising from situations in which this was not possible (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6. A couple of ‘bad ones’

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| In [church] one time, we had a pretty bad concert. It was a big one, and because we were so far apart, and the acoustics in there...That’s what’s obviously the problem, because you can’t hear people. It’s the acoustics and positioning. That was quite a bad one...We were in two opposite pews, and we were quite a long way apart. They had enough room to get a grand piano in there, and probably another one, width-wise, as well [laughs], and we were sort of sideways on. S6.4 |
| We sang [at church], and it was awful really, because we were too far apart. We weren’t together – we didn’t <i>feel</i> together. And because you couldn’t <i>hear</i> what the other parts were singing, it was very, very difficult. And you sort of were...At the end of it I felt as if I was going through the motions. I didn’t feel as though I was singing with the rest of them...You feel as though you’re not together. That’s the important thing about a choir. You’ve got to be together or else it sounds dreadful, doesn’t it? S11.3-4 |

The impact of these particular combinations of acoustics and position was obviously significant for these singers, who used strongly negative value judgements about these performances, describing them as ‘bad’, ‘awful’, ‘difficult’ and ‘dreadful’. S11 described feeling isolated from the rest of the singers by the acoustic conditions and consequently becoming so dispirited that he simply ‘went through the motions’ of singing rather than thoroughly engaging in the performance.

In both of the above scenarios (Table 4.6), the position and formation of the choir, as well as the inter-singer spacing, were partly determined by the size and layout of the venue. Both S6 and S11 describe wider spacing than they were used to between the vocal parts, due to singing in church choir stalls. A dislike of this position was relatively common amongst these participants (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7. Singing out

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| Somehow the sound doesn’t transmit in the same way, so it is a bit disconcerting, but I actually prefer to sing out to the...not across the church but down... S7.6 |
|--|

As well as problems with hearing each other due to the combined effect of room acoustics and choral configuration, additional problems related to

performing outside were frequently mentioned (Table 4.8). Again, participants felt that standing closer together helped them to hear each other in these situations.

Table 4.8. *Being outside*

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| If we're somewhere like in the open air, it's really difficult to hear everybody unless we're really, really close together. S2.5 |
| The only problem we had was outdoors when you can't hear it – that's the biggest danger. So [maybe] there needs to be a tighter formation outside. S8.34 |

The difficulty in accessing the reference from the rest of the choir as well as the feedback from one's own voice during outside events was reported as having a disorientating influence on the singers. This is likely to diminish their confidence in their own performance, as well as causing them to question their intonation and accuracy, and the quality of the overall choral blend (Table 4.9). Being unable to hear the other singers was repeatedly described as leading to feelings of exposure, self-doubt and isolation, and a consequent reduction in self-efficacy.

Table 4.9. *'As if you were singing a solo'*

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|---|
| FG3.H: I think the other time that sapped our confidence was when we sang outside. |
| FG3.N: And we couldn't hear each other. |
| FG3.H: We couldn't hear <i>anything</i> ! [...] |
| FG3.C: Nobody could hear anything. |
| FG3.N: I think we were all just singing louder and louder, 'cause we thought they couldn't hear us [...] |
| FG3.H: We didn't feel too good that day! |
| Researcher: Was it that you couldn't hear yourself or couldn't hear the others? |
| Several at once: We couldn't hear the others. |
| FG3.C: It was as if you were singing a solo. |
| FG3.H: You didn't know whether you were in tune or not. |
| FG3.39-40 |

4.2.3. Choir Formation

I like the feeling of being in a semicircle. If you're in a straight line, you feel very isolated [...] But you can actually see and communicate almost with the people the other side – you feel more of a whole – when you're singing in that sort of a shape. **S2.33**

At the time of data collection for this study, the majority of the interviewees sang in a variety of choirs, and most participants were concurrently members of several different ensembles, including large community choirs, choral societies, and amateur operatic societies. However, all focus group participants and fourteen of the participants in individual interviews were members of at least one group with less than 25 members, such as a chamber choir, small male voice choir, village singing group or church choir. This may partly explain the fact that the majority expressed a preference for a fairly tight-knit, single-layered, semicircular formation, which is not an option for larger choirs. Within this layout, the general preference was to be arranged in voice parts. Their reasons for these preferences included being able to hear each other better than in other layouts, such as a double-layered horseshoe, ranks of singers arranged in straight lines, configurations based on small sectional 'clusters', or 'mixed voice' formations. Most of the participants who also belonged to more substantial choral societies, along with the two participants who were members of larger community choirs, similarly favoured semicircular formations with the voice parts arranged in block sections. The preferred choir formations were those which they saw as maximising the potential for their preferred self-to-other ratio (Table 4.10).

Table 4.10. The tight semicircle.

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| Sometimes that can happen, when we're not standing in a semicircle, maybe, you know, as we do. We can't hear the basses and they can't hear us, you know. If you can't...if the acoustics are wrong from that point of view. It's a lot, lot better if we're all close together and can all hear each other. S2.5 |
| I like [...] it to be quite a tight semicircle really... so you can literally hear the tenors bouncing off you, the basses bouncing off...you can hear <i>everybody</i> around you. S3.4 |
| The arch that we had on Saturday was great. And, as long as you can <i>hear</i> the other sections, and nine times out of ten you can do that S8.33 |

S4 and S6 (Table 4.11) expressed similar preferences for formations that they perceived as allowing closer spacing, and both indicated their impression that a semicircular formation, arranged in vocal parts, helped them to hear the other singers.

Table 4.11. Getting the arrangement 'right'

| |
|---|
| I like it to be in a semicircle. So I can hear the rest of the guys singing [...] It's very difficult if you can't hear your colleagues at all. Definitely. S4.24 |
| Sometimes we try and sit two in the front, two in the back, but then you're further apart [...] I think the first time with [chamber choir], when we sang in [church], the arrangement just didn't seem right [...] We were more...a flatter semicircle – we were wider, if I remember rightly, and there was something where the basses couldn't hear the sopranos. And then, when we came round like this time [indicates tighter semicircle], it seemed much better, and everyone was happier. S6.7 |

Ten of the individual interviewees spontaneously introduced the idea that, as well as hearing each other, being able to see the other singers is helpful. It was generally felt that eye contact between performers was easier in the semicircular formation (Table 4.12).

Table 4.12. Seeing and hearing

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|---|
| <i>Usually</i> we stand in a semicircle, so with either end more or less facing each other...In a single line...We can see each other, and we can hear each other, or we're more likely to. S13.15 |
| I like this sort of arrangement [draws semicircle]. I much prefer it – you can see everybody out of the corner of your eye, in whichever direction, and it's nice to be like that. And I think the sound as well...I think the sound is good when it's like that...You can hear each other a lot better. Definitely. S2.33 |

The point about this layout facilitating eye contact with the other singers is potentially important, as it relates to the concepts of emotional contagion and the chameleon effect (see Chapter 2). Being able to see each other may be helpful, in terms of confidence building during performance, especially if singers are mirroring positive non-verbal communication. S4 (Table 4.13) enumerated several reasons for preferring a formation that allows him to see other singers.

Table 4.13. ‘Giving it large in the back of their heads’

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| I still prefer to sing in a flat horseshoe, so you can see other people. It does help to see other people, rather than just sing at the back of their heads. I’m sure the altos don’t really care for that, when they’ve got four big fat basses giving it large in the back of their head, singing it very noisily into their ears! No, I think it does help for you to see people’s faces, because if they’re enjoying it as well, or you can see them with the words, and, you know, you can see them breathing, and...it just helps. Yeah. It helps to look at your colleagues. S4.24-25 |
|---|

Some of the reasons for preferring formations that enable eye contact therefore include being able to see other singers breathing, which may be an important cue and source of confidence when preparing for a musical entry; being able to see their lips moving, which undoubtedly gives essential textual cues when performing from memory; heightening the enjoyment of the performance experience by making eye contact and exchanging facial expressions reflecting positive emotions. Other advantages may be related to expressive factors, such as registering physical reminders of the mood and style of the song, as well as deriving moral support from facial expressions of mutual encouragement and approval during the performance.

S12 (Table 4.14) recounted a negative performance experience which demonstrated the importance of being well placed to maintain eye contact with the rest of the choir.

Table 4.14. Feeding off each other

We couldn't see each other, and we couldn't feed off each other, and it made it quite awkward. I could hear mistakes going on in the background, and it just didn't go well. **S12.2**

Alongside their preference for formations such as the 'horse shoe' shape, in which the singers stand in vocal sections, the majority of singers specifically expressed a dislike of singing in mixed voice formations (Table 4.15), in which their immediate neighbours are singing different parts.

Table 4.15. Mixing it up

I appreciate sometimes we do this mixing for rounds and things. I don't have a problem with that, I'm not criticising that. But what I'm saying is, with the majority of stuff, if we're in sections, whether it's in a semicircle or even in lines, then I would sooner stay in the sections, the men's section or the tenor section, than I would be mixing. **S8.34**

Only three participants expressed a preference for mixed voice formation, and these singers all described themselves as particularly confident performers (Table 4.16).

Table 4.16. 'I was scared the first few times but...'

FG2.B: I think it's lovely to mix up with different people, as you do sometimes, and actually sing next to different people [...]

FG2.K: But it takes a lot...You're more confident, and some people aren't confident enough to stand with a soprano one side and a bass the other.

FG2.B: Well, I was scared the first few times, but it comes, and you suddenly find 'Wow, I can do this!' But you shouldn't do it unless you know the song well, of course.

FG2.55

Sometimes we are mixed up so that you have to know your own part. The [University choir] quite regularly will say 'That row of sopranos, would you go and stand over there. I want you all to mix up. I don't want you to be alongside people in the same part'. And it really is a learning curve, because you have to know what you're singing, you have to be confident, and you've got different voices, different parts all round you, and a completely different sound is made as a result. **S14.22-23**

The main benefits described as arising from mixed voice formations were generally connected with the singer's perception of performance quality and choral

blend, rather than on subjective affect. S14 and FG2.K (Table 4.16) both acknowledged that a certain amount of self-confidence is a prerequisite for singing in this kind of configuration, and that mixed voice formation should only be used when the singers are very familiar with the music, as this familiarity is assumed to be a major factor in creating the required confidence level. It is, however, recognised that the preferences expressed in this study may partly be related to a lack of familiarity with the mixed voice format, as reflected in the later comments on consistency (see section 4.2.5.)

4.2.4. Position within the Venue

If you're in a venue that hasn't got brilliant acoustics, you don't hear [the other singers]. So I think it's better...it does make a difference where the positioning is. And it also makes a difference where...how sort of intimate you are, if you like. **S3.4**

The majority of participants felt that their confidence could be affected by their ability to hear each other, and that this was facilitated by closer inter-singer spacing and semicircular formations arranged according to voice parts. However, many reported that the space, size and/or shape of the performing area often meant that maintaining their preferred position was not possible. Some of the effects of moving from the rehearsal room to the concert venue, and the need for careful preparation for this were discussed in Chapter 3, in relation to the need for optimising individual and collective presentation in performances. Similarly, when exploring the acoustic effects of choir configuration, and its relationship to confidence levels, the impact of the choir's position within the venue was repeatedly raised. There were also concerns about the physical limitations imposed by the spatial characteristics of some venues upon choir formation and spacing. S4 (Table 4.17) introduced this theme by describing

an occasion on which this affected his morale as well as his perception of the performance.

Table 4.17. 'Complete rubbish!'

I was stood right on the *front* 'cause there was hardly anywhere to stand. I was away from the rest of the guys, *right* at the front. And I don't think they could hear, so they were singing rubbish in the background, and I was singing *complete* rubbish out the front and I couldn't hear *anybody* [laughs]. That was *terrible*. Actually that was probably the worst one we've sung. **S4.12**

Practicalities that are particular to individual venues, such as the size and layout of the performance area, can have an obvious impact on the spacing, position and formation of the choir. S15 (Table 4.18) compared two different rehearsal experiences which affected her ability to hear the other singers.

Table 4.18. Closer is better

When we first started rehearsing in the [chapel], we sat in the pews, so it was sopranos on one side of the aisle, altos on the other side of the aisle, and basses and tenors behind us. And then we changed, so that we now sit in the choir stalls, again sopranos on one side, altos on the other, tenors behind the sopranos and basses behind the altos. But that makes us closer in, and that's better. That's much, much better. **S15.12**

This is an exception to the tendency, amongst these singers, to dislike performing in formations imposed by the physical limitations of churches with choir stalls. However, S15's preference in this respect was still influenced by her need to hear the other performers more than her own vocal output, and she felt that this was facilitated by closer inter-singer positioning, all of which is consistent with the preferred SOR which has so far been in evidence amongst these participants.

S3 (Table 4.19) described some of the situational problems affecting the singers' ability to hear their co-performers, including the effect of particular

room acoustics, the size and shape of the performing area , and the layout and position of the choir with the venue.

Table 4.19. ‘Difficult’ venues

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| I find the [village hall] quite difficult to sing in. Whether that’s because of where we’re positioned on the stage – and that seems to swallow up the sound – I don’t know. Or whether it’s because we can’t form...the choir seem really kind of...they form a semicircle and then they seem to drift out of it and move...and be...[draws straight line on table]. By the end of the concert, you can’t hear what anybody else’s singing, because they’re singing straight outwards. S3.4. |
|--|

The subject of the choir’s position within the venue was raised by several participants as a factor in confidence levels and, in many cases, was specifically related to such issues as being able to see the conductor, being able to hear the accompaniment, and being able to hear the other voice parts (Table 4.20). It was recognised that physical limitations due to structural features of the venue can impose unfamiliar configurations upon the choir, which can lead to insecurity due to difficulties in hearing fellow performers.

Table 4.20. ‘Layout within the venue’

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| The [concert hall] is <i>not</i> a favourite venue for me because of the organ in the middle. And you’ve got your tenors and basses there. Huge organ. Then you’ve got your altos and sopranos. You’re physically divided. S14.6 |
| There was one piece that we did with [choral society], and it was a big orchestra – well, the percussion, which was big, was right in front of us, and...the singers, the soloists were immediately in front of us, and then the percussionists, and it was really hard to hear, and indeed to see. So it wasn’t the room or the venue so much as the layout within the venue that made it difficult because it’s really hard to pick up your cue because there’s too much going on. S7.4 |

Additional complications arising from the interaction of choir position and room acoustics, such as a time delay between different vocal sections, or not being able to hear the accompaniment, especially in larger venues, were also raised (Table 4.21).

Table 4.21. 'Lagging'

If we're not positioned where you can *hear* people, and you're not getting any time lag between one end and the other... If we've got an accompanist, it's not being able to hear the piano, because you can run away, or they can, you know, lag. **S6.5**

Visibility of the conductor, as well as of fellow performers, can sometimes be affected by the configuration necessitated by the size and shape of the performing area. Being unable to see the conductor was described as having a particularly serious effect on singers' confidence during performance (Table 4.22).

Table 4.22. 'A big problem'

FG2.K: And obviously I don't like it if I can't see [conductor]. That's really...
[All agree.]
FG2.K: That's really frightening, if you can't see who's conducting you. That's quite a big problem.
FG2.B: That's the worst part, if you can't see the conductor. Because, very often, if you stand behind someone very tall, you can't see the conductor. It's very frustrating. And you have to look at the others, to see their mouths moving, to see where you are.
FG2.43

'Frightening' and 'frustrating' are strong words and convey the singers' sense of insecurity if the conductor is not clearly visible. Keeping track of 'where you are' in the music is obviously one benefit of being able to see the conductor, but the word 'frightening' also suggests that there is an element of moral support derived from eye contact with the group leader.

The position of the conductor relative to the choir can also make a difference to the singers' perception of their own vocal directionality, to their ability to hear their colleagues, and to their feelings about the performance. S6 (Table 4.23) described a situation in which the conductor's position meant that the singers had to face in a particular direction in order to see him, which affected their perception of the

reference from the rest of the choir. S7 and S15 described other situational factors which can cause difficulties with the singers' line of sight during performance.

Table 4.23. Conductor visibility

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| [Conductor] was a little bit down, at the end of the pews, into the body of the church, and we were looking down. And therefore, if you were looking down, we...For some reason, the voices were going down that way, and we couldn't really hear each other very well. S6.5 |
| At other times the soloists have always been <i>off</i> , you know, not in front of the choir, but to the left or right of it, and I don't know why they were there but...and there were three of them and, you know, they were big people. I couldn't see the conductor at all. S7.4 |
| Because I'm not very tall, and if I'm not careful, I can be buried in the middle, and I've got somebody tall in front of me, and I can't see the conductor, and it's just hopeless. Well, not hopeless, but I'm not as comfortable. S15.9 |

In all three of the above cases (Table 4.23), it seems that the problems derived from being unable to see the conductor, could be addressed with a few practical changes to the position of the choir, soloists, or the conductor himself. However, it is recognised that the possibilities for different positions may be limited due to the size and shape of the performance area.

For S16 (Table 4.24), all other considerations of choir formation and individual position within the choir were eclipsed by his need to see the musical director (MD), and he felt that this was a major factor in maintaining his confidence during performances.

Table 4.24. 'I don't mind where I go'

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| Make sure I can see the MD. That really is my preference. 'Cause sometimes if I get put in a row further back I struggle to see, 'cause I'm only short [laughs]. But as long as I can see the MD <i>easily</i> , then I don't mind where I go. S16.10 |
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Similarly, S1 (Table 4.25) mentioned that focusing on the conductor while singing was a useful strategy for managing her nerves.

Table 4.25. Concentrating on the conductor

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| If I've got a conductor in front of me, and I'm not very comfortable, or I can see somebody that I know, or it's very bright and I can see them all [the audience], I will concentrate purely on the conductor and that controls me. S1.10 |
|---|

4.2.5. Consistency of Position

I like to be with the people I rehearsed with, because
you build a rapport. **S9.27**

Most singers expressed a strong preference for a certain position relative to other voice parts, and often favoured a particular position in relation to singers in their own section (Table 4.26).

Table 4.26. 'Nothing against the tenors but...'

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| I like, particularly to be really quite opposite the basses. S3.4 |
| If I stood between the tenors...if I was the end one of the tenors, and the basses were there, I might be less confident than if I was standing in the middle, with the two tenors each side of me. S8.29 |
| I like to be between the basses and the altos in the mixed voice choir, really. S6.20 |
| I think hearing the soprano line helps, 'cause that's typically the melody and, you know, all the other lines fit into that. That certainly helps. It doesn't matter if we don't hear the tenors, OK? Nothing against the tenors, but it's sometimes a bit easier if you can't hear the tenors 'cause you will clash. So maybe it's easier if you don't hear the one next to you. But certainly the soprano line does help. S4.24 |

However, some singers, acknowledged that the choir formation and position they prefer, and feel most secure in, may be due to familiarity (Table 4.27), as well as to their perception that they can hear the other singers more clearly in their favoured semicircular layout.

Table 4.27. Custom and practice

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| We always sit in a semicircle and we always stand in a semicircle. [Conductor] <i>likes</i> us like that 'cause then he can hear the whole sound...And we do sing a lot better if we're like that. I mean, even though the tenors are singing something slightly different, or a lot different, to what you are, you still like to hear them to make sure you're with them. S11.18 |
| I prefer semicircle. Well...because you can hear the other parts. And it's the way we normally rehearse as well, so again, it's normality for me...you can hear each other. And that gives you confidence as well. S2.5 |

Consistency of position in rehearsal was reported as helping confidence (Table 4.28), partly because the singers are accustomed to hearing certain neighbouring voices. This provides a consistent acoustic ambience, and helps the singer to acclimatise to the surrounding auditory references.

Table 4.28. 'Comfort' and 'confidence'

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| I think it's certainly very helpful that you position yourself in a performance the <i>same</i> as what you do rehearsing. If you're rehearsing, week in, week out, you know, you just get that feel of people round about you, and it, to my mind, improves the confidence if you can stand in that same position...Certainly I find it more comfortable standing in the same way, 'cause it's the environment you're used to – the voices and the sound coming from either side of you. FG3.C.18 |
|---|

Maintaining a constant position in performances as well as rehearsals was seen as helping to make the auditory cues relatively predictable, which made it easier for some singers to feel confident about finding their note and holding their own vocal line (Table 4.29).

Table 4.29. Knowing what to expect

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| I always like to be in the same relative position to the other singers all the time, because you get used to that environment, and it's just comfort, that you're not going to be next to someone who's going to lead you astray if you're not particularly strong on a piece - on holding a line - and you're used to hearing the juxtaposition of, say, the top tenor and your line, and you're sort of 'Oh, I'm going to be a third below', 'cause sometimes I'm not that brilliant at holding a line. S6.6-7 |
|---|

Consistency (or the converse) of position and formation between rehearsal and performance was raised by Focus Groups 2 and 3, and by eight of the sixteen participants in individual interviews. This theme, along with the negative effects of being unable to maintain consistency, was discussed at length and in detail by some singers (Table 4.30).

Table 4.30. Rehearsal and replication

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| It's not the singing that's worrying me, it's where on stage, you know...And we all feel comfortable in certain positions so, if you can't get into the position you normally stand in, that can be a bit upsetting. FG2.K.45 |
| As long as I'm roughly in the same position. I wouldn't like to be...When we've sung behind the sopranos, I don't like doing that [...] because we never usually sing like that in [chamber choir]. S6.20 |
| I think, probably if you're in the same position each week, that's the right thing to do [...] I think uniformity, continuity is important with regards to the rehearsals, but also that the rehearsal then replicates into the concert positions as well. 'Cause I think you do build confidence by singing with the people around you. S8.29 |

Participants expressed feelings of 'comfort,' 'confidence' and 'rapport' when describing rehearsing and performing in a regular position within the choir, and when familiar with singing in a particular format. Conversely, changes in the physical configuration of the choir when moving from the rehearsal room to the performing area were described as creating less confidence, and being, at times, 'worrying' or 'upsetting'. The problems seem to arise mainly from the changes in auditory feedback when a singer's position relative to their fellows, or in relation to other voice parts, is altered. However, the sense of trust that can develop between singers when they rehearse together regularly is also a factor (S8, Table 4.30). As well as being disorientating, changes in position can jeopardise the positive effects of this rapport, by juxtaposing singers with less familiar choir members (Table 4.31).

Table 4.31. ‘Completely different’

On the performance night, if you’ve got that... ‘Ooh! I’m not sitting with the people I’ve practised with!’ ‘Cause we practise sideways, looking at each other, with the men there. And then all of a sudden, for the dress rehearsal, you’re looking forwards, and it’s completely different...with different people. **S9.4**

Last-minute changes to formation and position were seen as particularly problematic for some singers (Table 4.32), as they can change the singers’ experience of the way in which the room acoustics affect the choral sound, as well as their ability to hear the reference from their fellow singers.

Table 4.32. ‘Don’t do that!’

If it’s suddenly lumped on you, ‘Oh, at this venue, we’ll need to do that,’ then [...] we’re going ‘No [conductor’s name] don’t do that! It’s going to ruin it!’ Because you think ‘No, we’re not going to be able to...’ **S6.22**

The emotive language used here demonstrates the negative connotations associated with unexpected alterations, with, in S6’s opinion (Table 4.32), the potential for disastrous results. The phrase ‘we’re not going to be able to...’ indicates a severe reduction in self-confidence as a result of a last-minute change in position, and indicates the strong association with position, configuration and self-efficacy.

Several singers gave specific examples of situations in which a change between rehearsal layout and choral formation in the concert venue had caused problems in performance quality (Table 4.33) and described their emotional responses to this.

Table 4.33. 'It's 'cause it's different'

Last year at the [annual concert] was the most appalling one, because of where we stood, and the acoustics. We just couldn't hear each other, and everybody was really disappointed that we hadn't done what we meant to do...It was a way we hadn't stood and sung when we had rehearsed...We just couldn't hear each other, and we just didn't sing well at all. **S5.4**

Rehearsals are...well, they're sideways. So we're in...the choir bit of the church, but we're facing inwards, just standing at an angle to face the conductor...But when we have the concert they turn all the chairs round so that we're facing the audience... Well, I suppose it's 'cause it's different, and you only get one dress rehearsal with everything in place so when you sing on the night, or at the dress rehearsal, it's disconcerting 'cause you can't hear the same cues, if you like, for how you've coped with...throughout the rehearsals, because you've got the altos behind you, but somehow the sound doesn't transmit in the same way, so it is a bit disconcerting. **S7.5-6**

Changing position was felt to affect the singers' ability to hear each other, and negative value judgements were attached to this (Table 4.33). The emotional reactions included a negative self-evaluation of personal vocal quality (S5) and dissatisfaction that, as a result of the change in configuration, the performance was not to the choir's full potential. The perceived reduction in performance quality was attributed to a reduced ability to hear the usual reference and cues from the other singers, due to the unfamiliar layout of the choir. The use of words such as 'worrying', 'disappointed', 'upsetting', 'disconcerting', and even 'appalling' highlight the emotional impact of these issues related to choir formation, and their impact upon self-confidence during performance.

S5 (Table 4.34) expressed the expectation that, with more practice at performing in alternative layouts, confidence when singing in those formations would increase.

Table 4.34. ‘Comfort and practice’

I think I’m naturally more comfortable when we do a semicircle. But I think that’s because we rehearse as a semicircle. And therefore we do it more often. If we were to say that the only way we can continue to use the rehearsal space we’ve got and have the extra two sopranos and two altos and another bass and whatever, is to actually start sitting in lines, then you’d be used to *that*, you know. [...] So it’s about comfort and practice...Your ears are trained...You’re listening to people in a different way, so you then get used to the fact that the altos are in front of you instead of opposite you, or however you’ve arranged it, or the tenors are in front of us instead of to the side of us. **S5.28**

S11 and FG3.D (Table 4.35) described the mediating effect that experience may have, for some singers, on the need to maintain a regular position in relation to other singers within the ensemble.

Table 4.35. ‘It doesn’t bother me as much now’

When I first joined them, I tended to keep with a couple of chaps. [Bass] was one because he was accomplished as far as that was concerned [...] And [second bass] – he was one of the others – he’s been singing in [choir] for years and years and years. So yes, I felt a little bit comfortable. But now, quite frankly, I’m not really particularly bothered. **S11.18**

When I first came back...I mean, I remember we were singing up at the golf club, and I stood between [first bass] and [second bass], and I suddenly couldn’t do it, so I asked to move to the other side of [second bass]. It doesn’t bother me as much now. I can more or less stand wherever we are, but at that time it very much had to be that. **FG3.D.18**

The likelihood that singers might be more able to adapt to changes in room acoustics and choir configuration as a result of wider performing experience is expressed in S5’s description of the collective progress made by his choir (Table 4.36).

Table 4.36. Coping with ‘subtleties’

I think we’re stronger now [...] Sometimes all we need is an hour or so in the afternoon to get that right. And we probably wouldn’t be full on right, but we can cope with it far more than we could two years ago, when everything had to be really just right, you know. It’s familiarity. I guess it would be the same as somebody who’s used to playing one piano and then suddenly has something different. That will affect their confidence. So it’s just those little subtleties. **S5.29**

4.2.6. Acclimatising to Different Venues

You've worked for something and something just slightly changes, and you end up not giving the performance you'd rehearsed in your mind, because of some factor that changed. And that's never nice. **S5.5**

The positive effect on confidence of rehearsing at the performance venue has already been discussed, in relation to perfecting the finer points of the physical presentation of the choir, and rehearsing the practical aspects of performance, such as entries and exits onto the stage (see Chapter 3). The opportunity to acclimatise to the performance venue was similarly emphasized as a matter of great importance by all participants, with specific reference to dealing with some of the interdependent issues related to choral acoustics and choir configuration. Rehearsing in the performance space reduces potential distractions caused by unfamiliarity with the environment, including differences in the acoustic conditions of the concert venue compared with the rehearsal room. This aspect of preparation was spontaneously raised by the participants in the first two focus groups, and discussed at length (Table 4.37).

Table 4.37. 'A security blanket'

FG1.K: I find it very useful to go, like, to the church and find out where you are going to stand, how we're going to come on. Having my stage hat on...where are we coming on, going off. If you go to a strange place and you're not sure where you're going to stand, how much room you're going to have.

FG1.C: And how it sounds as well.

FG1.H: Warm up as well...always a bit of a warm up. When we had that rehearsal in the afternoon it made such a difference and I couldn't quite work out why but you're right. Having the confidence that you know where you are, where you're going to stand.

FG1.K: It's a security blanket really. **FG1.K.31**

Although these singers gave a comprehensive rationale for rehearsals in situ, including becoming accustomed to the acoustic properties of the venue, this is not infallible as the reverberation and absorbency will alter once the audience has arrived.

However, the participants appreciated the increased sense of security derived from opportunities to practice entries and exits; to adapt to any changes that have had to be made to choir formation, position or spacing; and to acclimatise, to some extent, to the conditions created by the interaction of the room acoustics, choir acoustics and the effects of choral configuration.

In common with the majority of participants, S6 (Table 4.38) felt less confident in mixed voice configurations, but recognised that positioning may need to change due to restrictions in the size and shape of the performance area.

Table 4.38. ‘Where’s so and so?’

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| <p>Maybe it’s just lack of experience, that we haven’t done these different...Where it was quite good was when [researcher/conductor] said ‘Let’s bunch up as we’re going to do it at the venue.’ And you had the sopranos in a bunch, and the tenors behind, and then the altos in front on the other side, but it does seem a bit odd [laughs]. Because we’re not used to it and we don’t do it enough, it always seemed a bit ‘Ooh, where’s [alto], or where’s so and so?’ [...] If you’re well practised, and well rehearsed at singing in different groups, then that is just a variation of what you normally do. S6.21</p> |
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Some possible strategies were extrapolated by S6 (Table 4.38) from his concerns about changes in layout and position. Like S5 (Table 4.34), he conjectured that becoming accustomed to rehearsing in different positions might help singers to adopt a more flexible attitude to layout and position, and to adapt when situational factors at the performance venue dictate a change of formation. When it is not possible to rehearse in the performance venue, practising in the configuration necessitated by the shape and size of the stage may mitigate the sense of disorientation and distraction sometimes experienced in an unfamiliar venue. Singers would then acclimatise more quickly to different acoustic environments, and become less reliant upon remaining adjacent to particular colleagues.

FG2.K (Table 4.39), however, pointed out that practising in the rehearsal room, using the planned formation for the concert, is not as helpful as rehearsal at the performance venue, due to situational variations such as acoustics and physical layout of the performance area.

Table 4.39. 'It's not the same'

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| <p>Although [we rehearse in] concert formation at times, it's still not the same as when you arrive in a venue and you've got steps or you haven't got steps, you've got to come in this way, you've got to go out that way, and there's an awful lot to remember about your physical on-and-offs that you've had no time to rehearse – or maybe in the afternoon you've had a brief rehearsal. FG2.K.44</p> |
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There was a clearly stated desire for more opportunities to practise in situ, as unaccustomed acoustic effects in some venues can be unsettling and cause singers to doubt themselves (Table 4.40).

Table 4.40. 'We're all anxious'

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| <p>I just wish we could do more rehearsals like that [in the venue]. S7.6</p> |
| <p>Of course, the acoustics change and everything, which is another thing. And sometimes it reverberates, and you think 'Are we behind? Are the men with us?' All that goes on. S9.6</p> |
| <p>In the [chapel] I find that very difficult. And the noise reverberating. And I'm not confident when I'm in there, particularly about really going for it...the sound is different, and we're all anxious. I think everyone's quite anxious in that environment. S15.8</p> |

Limited opportunities to rehearse at the concert venue before the performance may be due to room availability or financial concerns, as hire fees can be expensive for amateur choirs to fund. However, given the significance of this factor in affecting confidence levels amongst amateur choral singers, addressing such practicalities may be a priority for some ensembles.

4.2.7. Forward Thinking

Organisation? It's just about keeping everybody happy, really. **S14.37**

S9 (Table 4.41) painted a picture of her relatively chaotic experiences of dress rehearsals, which she felt could be improved with some attention to practical organisation.

Table 4.41. A 'ridiculous situation'

You get little people, coming late, who are stuck at the back and can't see. And that's a *big* beef. We keep saying 'Put the smaller people at the front'. And there *are* people who love to be on the front row – they are there, very much! And let them, and then let the people who are smaller but less confident go behind them, and then let the taller people come. I mean, there's one lady...she's taller than me – and she'll say 'I *have* to move because you can't see past me!'...And you just think 'Good for you!' But it's a very closed shop. It's the most amazingly ridiculous situation to be in. It really is. For goodness' sake! **S9.17**

S14 (Table 4.42) elaborated on this theme of logistical forethought, emphasizing the role of careful planning and preparation for the practical aspects of rehearsal and performance.

Table 4.42. Knowing where you're going

I think if you know where you're going to be sitting, particularly with a small group, it helps, because sometimes you may be in a different venue for a rehearsal, so you might be a bit late getting there, and so if you can just move in to a position properly, you know, instead of having to go into a side cupboard and collect a chair and carry it across and put it on the end of a row somewhere. **S14.27**

Based on these findings, it seems that some participants would prefer a more proactive approach from their musical leaders, in order to pre-empt some of the problems described. Practical suggestions from the participants included planning voice placement and position (Tables 4.41-4.42); practising in the most appropriate choir formation for the venue (Table 4.38); arranging sufficient rehearsal

time in the concert venue (Tables 4.37-4.40); taking into account the relative height of choir members when deciding upon voice placement (Tables 4.23 and 4.41); ensuring that everyone can see the conductor clearly (Table 4.22-4.25) and, where possible, that eye contact can be made between at least some of the performers (Tables 4.12-4.14).

Given the unsettling effect of being unaccustomed to particular positions when transferring from the rehearsal room to the concert venue, and of the potentially disruptive effects of any uncertainty regarding individual placement within the performance area, these practical concerns are integral to the consideration of choral confidence. S8 and S14 (Table 4.43) provide illustrations of organisational strategies which have, in their experience, had a positive impact.

Table 4.43. 'Marshalling the troops'

| |
|--|
| My husband sings tenor with [choral society] and he's given a number, and then he knows exactly where he's got to be in the choir stalls. In the [chamber choir], I know where the conductor wants me to stand, so I know where I am. S14.7 |
| In the male voice choir, we used to have a marshal... like a sergeant-major. And before performances he would suss out the area where we were standing...We would come in...and then stand in our positions, and he would stand in front, and go like that [mimes checking the spacing between people] before we started, and then, when we left, he'd come and say 'Right', and we'd lead off. S8.61 |

Finally, S1 (Table 4.44) described the sense of security derived from a well-organised dress rehearsal, in which positions, and physical entries and exits, are thoroughly rehearsed, and expressed her appreciation of the discipline of this part of the preparation.

Table 4.44. 'We know what we're doing'

| |
|---|
| I like it the way it's organised...You [researcher/conductor] put us in positions, and we know exactly what we're doing. We go through it, and then in the evening we know where we're sitting, we know what we're doing, and I like that. I know where we have to sit, so when we've finished we come off, this is where we go. And I like it very rigid like that. S1.37 |
|---|

4.3 THEMATIC SUMMARY

This chapter's superordinate theme relates to choir configuration and its impact on confidence levels in choral rehearsal and performance (see Figure 6). Aspects related to choir configuration include the layout or formation of the choir, the spacing between the singers, the position of the choir within the venue and the position of the individual singer within the choir. All of these factors were reported, by the participants in this study, as affecting the acoustic ambience of the choir, and thereby affecting their perceived self-efficacy.

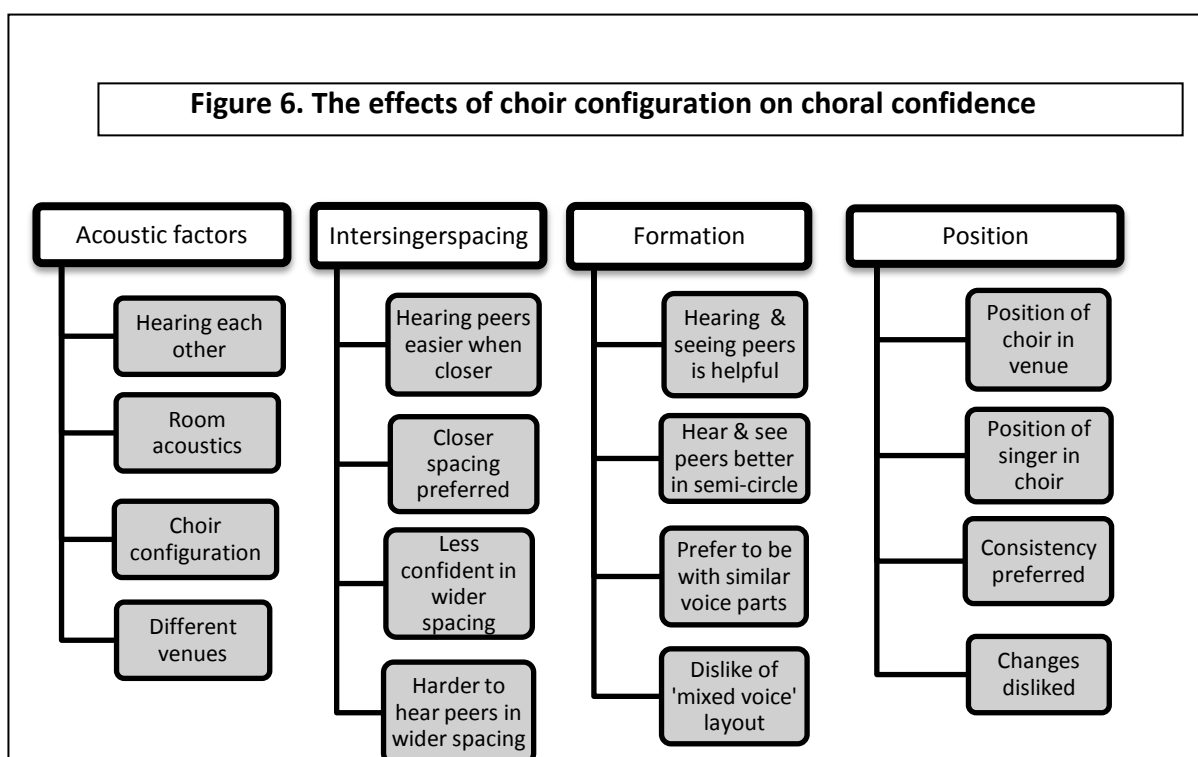
A recurring theme amongst the participants was the importance of being able to hear their fellow singers, rather than hearing themselves above the other singers. For the majority of participants, hearing those on the same vocal part was paramount, in relation to confident performance. Also, depending upon the repertoire, hearing singers on other particular parts was also a priority. The choral singers' ability to hear their fellow singers was reported as being affected by room acoustics, which they recognised as varying in different venues, as well as by choir configuration, and some specifically identified an interaction between all of these elements.

Closer spacing was seen as improving the singers' ability to hear their neighbours and was therefore felt to have a positive effect on confidence. 'Mixed voice' formations reportedly detracted from confident performance, whilst layouts which allowed singers to remain close to singers on the same vocal part were viewed as having a positive impact on confidence. Choir configurations, such as the semi-circular formation, which were seen as improving the singers' ability to hear, and to make eye contact with, each other, were similarly preferred. The improved ability to

see some of the other singers is likely to relate to the earlier themes relating to facial feedback and body language (see Chapter 3 and Appendix 1: Diagram 5).

The position of the choir within the venue, as well as of the individual within the choir, was reported as having an impact upon the singers' perceptions of their own vocal performance, with an effect upon perceived self-efficacy. Consistency of position in relation to their fellow choir members was very important for the confidence of some participants. Singers also expressed a desire for increased opportunities to acclimatise to their concert venues, which are often acoustically very different from their accustomed rehearsal environment.

These themes will be further discussed, and compared with previous research, in the next section.



4.4. DISCUSSION

4.4.1. Configuration, Closeness and Confidence

My findings have demonstrated that factors related to self-to-other ratio (SOR) and choir configuration have a strong influence upon the performance experience for amateur singers, in terms of their perception of performance quality, and consequently their feelings of satisfaction and self-efficacy. The high incidence of references to factors relating to SOR and configuration indicates their significance for the participants in this study, and suggests that these matters are pivotal in the context of amateur choral confidence.

The superordinate emergent theme of choir configuration encompassed the formation or layout of the choir; the spacing between the singers; the position of the choir within the venue; and the position of the individual within the choir. The impact of these aspects of configuration was strongly related to their perceived effect upon the ability of amateur singers to hear and see their fellow performers, and confidence levels were commonly reported as being affected by the audibility of the reference provided by other singers.

These findings differ significantly from the results of previous research in a number of ways. Firstly, in contrast with research in which formation had less influence on choral blend than the spacing between the singers (Aspaas et al., 2004; Daugherty, 1999, 2003; Ekholm, 2000), participants in the current study focused on aspects of choir formation as well as on inter-singer spacing. Secondly, where a preference regarding formation was expressed in previous studies, mixed voice formations were generally preferred by auditors and singers (Aspaas et al., 2004;

Daugherty, 1999). Conversely, in my study, a dislike of mixed formations was specifically mentioned, and there was a widespread preference for a layouts arranged in vocal sections. Although this may have been due to the habitual use of these configurations, the same applies to some of the previous research in which preferences for mixed formations may have been influenced by familiarity (Daugherty, 1999). Thirdly, the current participants raised additional concerns related to the interaction of room acoustics and choral sound in different venues; the position of the choir within the venue; the position of the choir in relation to the conductor and piano or orchestral accompaniment; the position of the individual singer within the choir; and the consistency of position within the ensemble. The disorientation sometimes experienced as a result of acoustic variations in different venues, due to the interaction of choral position, formation and spacing with room absorption and reverberation, was felt to have a particular impact on confidence levels. All of these factors were seen as having an effect upon the singers' perception of performance quality, their mastery experiences, and their confidence during performance. Distractions related to less favourable positioning and unfamiliar layout are also likely to impede flow and its associated benefits, such as loss of self-consciousness and enhanced self-confidence (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

Although this study reveals wider concerns amongst amateur choral singers than the effects of inter-singer spacing, the most significant difference between my findings and previous research specifically relates to this (also see Bonshor, 2013a). In contrast with the majority of previous empirical studies (Daugherty, 1999, 2003; Ekholm, 2000), a strong preference for relatively close spacing was expressed by the majority of participants in the current study. There was a widespread recognition

amongst the participants that closer spacing enabled choral singers to hear each other more effectively, and their preference for closer spacing was largely based on this. Although the preferred SOR in previous studies tends to be that which allows the singer to hear his own voice above the singers adjacent to him (Ternström, 1994; 1999), my findings demonstrate that the need to hear other singers is paramount amongst amateur choral singers. This is directly relevant to fostering choral confidence, as participants described deriving a sense of security from the close proximity and audibility of their fellow performers, particularly in relation to intonation, pitch, dynamics, rhythm and musical cues.

4.4.2. Effects of Sampling, Research Focus and Method

The contrast between these new findings and those presented in previous research is likely to be due to a number of factors, including differences in research focus, method and sample. The research focus of the current study contrasts with previous research in this area, which has centred on judgements of choral blend by auditors rather than on the subjective experiences of the singers (Daugherty, 1999, 2003; Ekholm, 2000). Where singers have previously been consulted about their preferences for choir formation and spacing, the emphasis has largely been on sound quality and intonation (Aspaas et al., 2004) rather than on perceptions of confidence or self-efficacy. It is also likely that the qualitative approach of the current study may have facilitated more disclosure about the singers' subjective feelings and perceptions, and has therefore resulted in a different outcome.

In contrast with the current sample, the participants in previous relevant research were generally drawn from university choirs, with a comparatively high level

of musicianship (Aspaas et al. 2004; Daugherty 2003; Ekholm 2000; Lambson, 1961). Daugherty's (2003) sample, for instance, consisted of a select, well-trained and experienced, undergraduate chamber ensemble in which all but two singers were music majors, and all of the choristers had private voice lessons. Whilst this research has applications for similar groups of singers, samples such as these are not typical of the vast majority who take part in amateur choral ensembles, and the results cannot therefore be generalised to the wider population of adult amateur choristers. This is partly due to the wide range of variables to be considered when planning choir formation and spacing, as the interaction of these variables results in a complicated acoustic scenario. SOR is not only affected by room absorption, but is also affected by the number of singers (Ternström, 1999) and individual differences in vocal output (Ternström, 1994). It has also previously been acknowledged that spacing preferences may vary according to the ability of the singers:

‘Weak’ singers tended consistently to prefer closer spacing. ‘Average’ and ‘strong’ choristers significantly preferred spread spacing. (Daugherty, 1999: 235)

The mixed voice formations favoured by previous research participants (Aspaas et al., 2004; Daugherty, 1999) may also be inappropriate with less experienced or less proficient choirs (Lambson, 1961), as they may place excessive demands upon the singers' capacity to maintain their vocal line independently (Lamb, 2010) and may therefore 'reduce confidence and self-esteem' (Durrant, 2003: 301). Although adult amateur singers are not necessarily less experienced or less competent, they have often received less formal musical training than the participants in other studies, and may therefore have different perceptions and needs. In my study, only two of the interviewees had received musical education beyond secondary school, and the

majority of participants had little formal experience of singing during their school years. The more highly trained participants in previous research would not necessarily have the same need for prioritising hearing other singers, which the amateur singers in this study reported associating with musical and moral support.

4.4.3. Experience and Self-efficacy

Experience does not appear to be a factor in the differences noted between the more formally trained choral singers previously studied and the adult amateur singers examined here (also see Bonshor, 2002). The majority of the amateur participants in this study have extensive choral singing experience (both in terms of years spent in participation, and in the variety of different types of choirs and repertoire), yet the majority still express preferences for an SOR that allows them to hear others rather than themselves, and they feel that closer spacing accommodates this requirement. It may therefore be assumed that the difference in training is, in itself, partly responsible for the different results derived from this study.

It is also possible that preferred SOR and spacing varies according to self-efficacy for singing and musicianship, as well as in relation to general confidence levels. If singers are confident that their voice production is efficient, that their intonation is reliable, their pitch is accurate in terms of adhering to their own vocal line, and that their musical entries are timely, then they have less need of an SOR that allows them to hear other singers, and will prioritise hearing themselves so that they can monitor their own performance. However, if a singer is less confident in any of these areas, as some of these amateur choral singers profess, then a positive SOR is less helpful than one which allows them to hear the other singers for musical and moral support. The

optimal choir configuration for a particular ensemble might therefore depend upon the self-efficacy of the singers, as well as upon other factors such as their proficiency or musical training.

4.4.4. Consistency and Flexibility

Consistency of choral configuration was valued by the majority of participants and was credited with conferring a sense of security upon the singers. This positive effect on confidence was partly due to the rapport which can develop between choir members who regularly sing together in the same relative positions, as well as due to the predictability of the acoustic ambience when choral configuration and individual position remain constant. For example, many singers expressed negative feelings about changes in position due to limitations in the performance space, compared with the rehearsal room. The changes in the acoustic environment were attributed to standing in an unfamiliar position in relation to their co-performers, as well as to the inevitable variations in room acoustics. The importance of opportunities to rehearse in the concert venue was therefore related to the need to acclimatise to the room acoustics, as well as becoming accustomed to any alterations in configuration which may be dictated by the size and shape of the performance area. It was, however, acknowledged that preferences for particular choir formations, such as the semicircular layout arranged in voice parts, may simply be due to familiarity. Some singers speculated that the need for consistency may be mediated by experience of other configurations, and by a more flexible approach to position during rehearsals.

The amateur choral singers in this study had clear preferences for consistency of position; closer spacing; remaining within their own vocal sections rather than in

mixed voice configurations; and a SOR which favours the reference from other singers rather than their own vocal feedback. These preferences may be associated, to some extent, with the ways in which adult amateur singers relate to each other musically, socially and emotionally during rehearsals and performances. Some of these interactions and their implications for choral confidence will be explored in the next chapter.

5. COLLABORATION IN AMATEUR CHOIRS

5.1. BACKGROUND

5.1.1. Social and Hierarchical Organisation

The importance of choir configuration for amateur singers, and their need for closer spacing and consistency of position, as described in the previous chapter, may relate to the way in which members of amateur choirs report interacting with each other. In this chapter, some of my new findings related to these interactions will be presented, but a brief overview of existing research into group dynamics in musical ensembles will first be provided.

Previous studies have explored the benefits of choral singing in relation to social cohesion, community feeling and individual inclusion (Bailey and Davidson, 2002, 2005; Dingle et al., 2013; Faulkner and Davidson, 2006). However, little detailed research into amateur choirs as social units (particularly in terms of collective learning, internal group processes and structure) has been carried out so far.

There have been several studies of orchestral organisation and hierarchy (Allmendinger et al., 1994; Atik, 1994; Faulkner, 1973) but, in most cases, the emphasis has been on the role of the conductor, and his or her relationship with the players, rather than on peer interactions. The formal structure of the professional orchestras studied is usually quite different from the less formal structure of the amateur choir. The orchestra has more levels of hierarchy, being divided into instrumental sections, each with its own officially recognised leader. These leaders usually have a number of fairly well defined roles, such as the leader of the strings taking responsibility for

bowing decisions. Suggestions from other players are often considered, however, which can contribute to a personal sense of empowerment, and have positive effects on motivation (Allmendinger et al., 1996). There also exists a hierarchical structure for responding to directions from the conductor, as the section leader usually deals with particular issues arising from the conductor's comments to the section (Davidson, 1997: 218).

5.1.2. Group Interaction in Musical Ensembles

Studies of smaller ensembles have highlighted the effect of individual personalities and internal hierarchy upon group dynamics, including the role of the second violinist in a string quartet (Murnighan and Conlon, 1991); the particular contribution of individual members within ensembles, such as horn players in wind quintets (Ford and Davidson, 2003); and the correlation between the effectiveness of social relationships amongst performers and their ability to collaborate successfully as musicians (Murnighan and Conlon, 1991; Young and Colman, 1979).

The role of discourse in ensemble rehearsals has also been examined, largely concentrating on the verbal and non-verbal communication between co-performers in chamber groups (Davidson and Good, 2002; Goodman 2002). Chamber music ensembles display a 'unique culture of collaborative music-making' (King, 2006) due to their traditional functioning as conductorless groups, which is unlike the usual *modus operandi* in the majority of amateur choral ensembles. The string quartet has been interpreted as a 'self-managed team' (SMT), with joint responsibility for the 'whole product or process' (Gilboa and Tal-Shmotkin, 2012: 248). However, leadership qualities are not usually lacking in these professional chamber ensembles. Whilst 63%

of wind quintets have no formally defined leader (Ford and Davidson, 2003), in string quartets, the first violinists usually act as group leaders, taking on administrative responsibilities and decision-making regarding performance matters. Effective leadership styles in successful quartets combine directive and democratic approaches, according to the situational demands (Murnighan and Conlon, 1991).

The democratic model of shared leadership and self-governance found in many smaller instrumental ensembles was similarly observed in one of the comparatively rare studies of social and organisational factors in an internationally recognised, professional vocal group (Lim, 2014). Seven of the eight members had received formal music training at tertiary level, and all had acquired extensive, high-level performance experience before joining the ensemble. Due to the small size of the group, their level of training and experience, and their professional status, the organisational model of the ensemble was very different to that adopted by most amateur choral groups. The ensemble did not have a formal leader, and it was claimed by all members that each of them had total involvement in decision-making and planning, both in artistic and administrative matters. This management style would most probably become unwieldy in the majority amateur choirs, which are usually substantially larger than the ensemble in Lim's (2014) study. The model of the self-managed team is usually only viable in relatively small groups: 'The smaller the unit, the more likely it will function as an SMT' (Gilboa and Tal-Shmotkin, 2012: 32).

Since the majority of previous studies of group dynamics in musical performance have related to instrumental players, professional performers and smaller ensembles, there are many research questions still to be explored in relation to the collective functions and processes within amateur choirs. The emergent themes

presented later in this chapter will indicate some of the ways in which choral singers interact with each other, and the positive and negative influences that these interactions have on individual and collective confidence.

5.1.3. Collaboration and Communication

Although most of the earlier studies of larger instrumental ensembles have concentrated on the conductor-orchestra dyad (Boerner and von Streit, 2005, 2007; Hunt et al., 2004; Koivunen and Wennes, 2011), some research has begun to explore the significance of interpersonal and communication skills amongst players (Creech et al., 2008; MacNamara et al., 2008). In a study of musical and social communication in a professional orchestra of twenty players, it was found that ‘ensemble practices rely on collaborative and communicative skills, many of which are tacit and embodied’ (Dobson and Gaunt, 2013: 4). The term ‘Radar’ was used by these researchers to describe a set of skills including listening to, communicating with and adapting to other musicians during rehearsals and performances. This helps the players to blend with their closest neighbours, and to match timing, pitch and phrasing with other sections.

This indicates the existence of:

More complex levels of negotiation and communication within the ensemble than can be represented by a single uni-directional flow of communication from conductor to orchestra: the participants devoted greater attention to outlining the complex skills required for communicating and interacting with colleagues than to those required for following the directions of the conductor. (p. 15)

Despite the complex web of social and artistic relationships amongst members in performance ensembles, collaborative learning and peer interactions are often almost ignored in research that has traditionally focused on musical leadership:

The key characteristics of group creativity are improvisation, collaboration, and emergence. But we tend to neglect these characteristics. Instead, we often try to attribute the group's creativity to a single person: the group leader, the soloist, the director or conductor. (Sawyer, 2006: 153)

5.1.4. Situated Learning

In educational research, the emphasis on the role of the teacher or group leader has been supplemented with an appreciation of the importance of peer interactions. Within situated learning theory, traditional models of learning based on apprenticeship and mastery have been expanded upon and applied to a wide range of group practices in which learning takes place (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The main concepts include a perspective on learning as embodied and embedded in social life with a focus on modelling by peers, rather than purely concentrating upon verbal instruction by teachers or group leaders. As learners add to their skills and experience through peer learning and group practice, they move from peripheral to full participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The emphasis in this perspective is on the kinds of social engagement required to provide the appropriate context for learning to take place, rather than on the conceptual structures and cognitive processes involved. This approach shifts the locus of learning from an exclusively teacher-led process to a more collaborative undertaking. Wenger (1998) described this as a community of practice (CoP), in which the interactions between group members make a significant contribution to the learning process.

A CoP is a group of people who 'share a passion for something that they know how to do, and who interact regularly in order to learn how to do it better' (Wenger, 2004: 2). They have a shared interest in a common domain, participate in shared

activities and ‘build relationships that enable them to learn from each other’ (Wenger, 2011). This is an apposite description of the members of an amateur choir, with their shared interest in singing and their joint goals of learning songs together, polishing their musical and vocal delivery of the repertoire, and participating in choral performances.

Although the apprenticeship model traditionally implied a linear relationship between a student and a master, studies of apprenticeship have revealed complex relationships in which additional learning occurs between novices and more experienced apprentices (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Once this social aspect of learning was recognised, such CoPs were identified even in the absence of formal apprenticeship systems (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger, 2011). It has been suggested that the model of the community of practice may be applied to learning in musical settings, such as the professional vocal ensemble (Lim, 2014) or symphony orchestra (Dobson and Gaunt, 2013). The findings presented below will provide the basis for an examination of the applicability of some of the concepts related to social learning, with particular reference to amateur choral ensembles.

5.2. FINDINGS

5.2.1. Cohesion and Community

One of the reasons why we all enjoy it so much is because we have fun together. We’re like minded people so it’s a social thing as well as really enjoying the singing which I think is lovely. **FG1.H.5**

Throughout all of the focus groups and individual interviews, many participants discussed the value of the choir as a collective, social entity (Table 5.1). Some of the

main benefits of singing in a choir were described in terms of social cohesion and a sense of community.

Table 5.1. Comradeship and camaraderie

| |
|--|
| I started to enjoy being in the [Gilbert and Sullivan] and that type of lighter opera. And I enjoyed the camaraderie of doing it. S5.10 |
| All being <i>together</i> – a sort of camaraderie about it. It's good, 'cause you feel...It's like surfing on the crest of the wave, all four of you [tenors]. And also the whole choir, all together, you know. S6.3 |
| I think we've got a good rapport in [chamber choir]... One of the words we used to use in the male voice choir was <i>comradeship</i> . And if somebody was in trouble, or somebody was...even if they passed away, or a member of the family passed away, the choir was there. It was so, so tight. And I believe that builds good performances. I think that builds a good choir, personally. S8.32 |

The male singers in particular seemed to value this aspect of choral activity (Table 5.2), citing examples of community spirit in male voice choirs as well as informal singing associated with sporting activities.

Table 5.2. Male bonding

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|---|
| It's all about comradeship. And I think more so in a male voice choir, because we had seventy strong, and that was <i>really</i> ...There was a great <i>bond</i> there. FG3.Q.9W |
| When I was at [university], I was in the mountaineering club, and we'd go walking and then meet up in the pub in the evening, and sing old-fashioned Irish rebel songs, folk songs and whatever. And just being in that camaraderie of men singing together was always good. FG3.D.75 |
| The camaraderie, and having a chat with your friends. There's some smashing chaps [in the male voice choir]. I suppose it's because they're all a similar age [laughs]. S11.9 |
| When I came to [town], I was in the rugby club, and we used to go around the pubs every Christmas and sing carols. But they were a motley crew, and they always wanted me along 'cause I could always start singing the tune, <i>in tune</i> . And that really gave me some confidence. FG3.H.64 |

S13 (Table 5.3) explicitly introduced the idea that the choir is greater than the sum of its parts, and that the creation and achievement of the group derives from its interaction as a whole rather than simply from the efforts of the individual members.

Table 5.3. ‘Sharing all this stuff’

| |
|---|
| We have this <i>great</i> sense of community... I have a theory that, for a choir to survive, it’s bigger than just the people in it. It’s the creation of quality and of grace and of <i>sharing</i> all this stuff, which comes from the order of the choir. S13.24-25 |
|---|

5.2.2. Teamwork

Personally, [confidence] comes from the other chaps who I sing with.
That gives me the confidence. **S11.25**

The benefits of ensemble singing in relation to social cohesion, bonding and inclusion (Bailey and Davidson, 2002, 2005; Dingle et al., 2013; Faulkner and Davidson, 2006) have previously been identified, but the participants in the current study also specifically elaborated upon the particular satisfaction derived from achieving as a team (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4. ‘It all knits together’

| |
|---|
| There’s always something about achieving things as a team or a group that far outweighs individual achievement...I don’t think there’s anything that is better than achieving something as a team, whether it be as a team of two or as a team of thirty or a hundred. Some of the best projects I’ve been in have been as part of a team with a common goal...And that’s what a concert is. It’s a project team coming together to do a one-off thing. And you work on your pieces and you rehearse, and then you deliver on the day. S5.53 |
|---|

| |
|---|
| Suddenly you think to yourself ‘My goodness, we are the drums, we are the tubas, we are the bass, and they’re this, and they’re that, and they’re the fiddles, etcetera’. And you can think of a choir as being like an orchestra or a band. And you can see how it all knits together. It’s wonderful. S11.32 |
|---|

S5 related his concept of the choir as a team, and their performance as a team effort, to his work as a project manager. His sense of fulfilment in this kind of group enterprise often outstripped his satisfaction in individual achievements (Table 5.4). S11’s analogy of the choir as an orchestra suggested a sense of awe at being part of such a metaphorical well-oiled machine.

The feelings of team spirit and collective achievement were specifically credited as positive factors in creating confidence during performance. S3, a soprano in several chamber choirs, cited the awareness of ‘gelling’ as a significant factor in her confidence level (Table 5.5). S5 described a particularly ‘high status’ event (performing at a local civic ceremony) and the level of teamwork that resulted from rising to this challenge and reacting to the sense of occasion.

Table 5.5. Confidence from collaboration

| |
|---|
| I thought we sang as a <i>choir</i> the best that we sang. So that gave you confidence that you were sort of...everybody seemed to be on the right wavelength – we were gelling and things like that. S3.1 |
| I think it was just the culmination of working so hard, because we knew it was important for the choir, so the whole thing...There was that really good feeling. So I think that <i>team</i> performance...I don’t think, in solo terms, I’ve ever come out and felt that good, you know. S5.1 |

It was felt by some singers that the conductor can contribute to the sense of the choir as a team by ensuring that no one is made uncomfortable by being singled out for criticism, and by creating an environment in which patience is maintained while everyone learns.

Table 5.6. Encouraging team spirit

| |
|---|
| I think the way we do it is that no one is singled out, so I think that has a definite impact on us feeling like we’re a team, in your part... ‘Cause we <i>all</i> have to get there. And we all have to sing as a unit. So why single out one person? It’s just like ‘No, we just need to keep going until we <i>all</i> get it right.’ S10.30 |
|---|

This concept of the choir as a team was developed when participants were asked about their reactions to audience evaluations, with many singers recognising that, as choir members, they are judged on the performance of the choir as a whole (Table 5.7). This can take the pressure off the individual singer, as they are not being

personally assessed as a soloist might, and their responsibility for the performance in its entirety is shared.

Table 5.7. ‘Group effort’

| |
|---|
| Obviously, for most people who come to a concert, it’s about how the <i>choir</i> sing, because ...it is a group participation. So it’s how the <i>group</i> perform. So if you’ve got people who are really going off, or are going out of tempo, or...then obviously it’s going to affect the whole sound. S3.41 |
| In the choir, it tends...you don’t get someone saying to <i>you</i> , ‘You sang well,’ OK? You get feedback from the audience generally, I think. And that’s probably about right, ‘cause it’s a group effort in the choir. S4.18 |
| If you make a slip, just miss a word or something, [nobody’s] going to notice. But if as a body, or a group, or a section within the choir, you make a mistake, it might get noticed. S6.11 |

5.2.3. Listening and Blending

We have to *listen* to all the parts, so if somebody does screw it up you adjust. You have to, otherwise the whole thing’s just gonna fall apart. **S1.15**

As S3 (Table 5.7) pointed out, poor performances from individual choral singers can have a negative impact on the impression of the choir as a whole. Conversely, a level of collective and individual confidence is derived from knowing that the choir is performing well, as a team (Table 5.8)

Table 5.8. ‘Making a good sound’ together for the ‘feel-good factor’

| |
|---|
| We know that...when we get the tenors or the sopranos and the baritones or tenors together, that we make a good sound. We <i>know</i> it. FG3.Q.17 |
| When we’re all together, and we do make a good sound - which we <i>do</i> - that makes me feel good. It’s definitely a feel-good factor with the choir. And when we do the concerts, we’ve <i>achieved</i> that goal of so many pieces, and again, it always makes me feel good at the end of a concert. S1.48 |

It is possible for the choir’s performance as a whole to be perceived as successful, despite the individual singer remaining unconvinced of the quality of the performance from their own perspective (Table 5.9). The audience’s perception of the

performance is obviously different from that of the singers, and observers may, in some ways, be less critical than the singers imagine. Recognising this may be an important step towards increasing confidence in choral performance.

Table 5.9. 'Listening to the whole'

Often somebody in the audience says 'Actually, it was really good. That's probably the best I've heard you sing'. [...] So whether that is a personal thing, that you don't feel that you've sung well, so it is from your point of view quite a personal thing, that you think 'Grief, you could have done better than that'. But they were listening to the *whole*, not just to you. **S3.42**

S5, a bass with experience of singing in operatic societies, church choirs and chamber ensembles, particularly appreciated the positive feelings derived from a satisfying team performance. He expanded on this, with his thoughts on some of the elements of being part of the choral team. This singer felt that essential attributes include blending tonally and recognising the need to work with the rest of the team, and compared his reactions to two different new members (Table 5.10). He suggested that familiarity with the choir, its style and the voices of the members, acquired through prior experience of hearing them perform, is helpful to new singers being inducted into the group.

Table 5.10. Tonal compatibility

We've had a couple of people come and...I've really just felt that the harmony's not there in the bass line. It's just gone. And that person's voice doesn't fit in with us. And whether it's the fact that, you know, [two well-established fellow basses] and myself are of the more portly size of bass [laughs] and that gives us that type of tonal quality, or what – I don't know what it is. Or we just happen to all sing...all blend quite nicely. So therefore, you get somebody whose singing is not wrong – you're not thinking 'Oh, they're doing bum notes', or anything. But it's just the whole tonal thing disappears. **S5.23**

[Bass] comes in and yes, he's got a very strong voice, 'cause he's clearly...I've watched him for many years onstage, and he's a very good performer. But he's fitting in and taking on the challenge of being part of a line that's established and has that sound. And he's listened to that sound before he joined, and also he knows the others from performing with them on stage and whatever. And he is making that effort, and he's sounding right, you know. **S5.24**

In the second focus group there was great emphasis on the need to listen to each other, and some of the problems that can arise within the team when this does not happen (Table 5.11). This can occur due to being absorbed in one's own part to the exclusion of all else, or due to singing rather than listening when other people are trying to concentrate on learning new notes. The latter is of particular relevance in choirs where there are few sight-singers, and where learning therefore has to be achieved by rote. The participants here also recognised that listening whilst learning and performing is a skill that can be acquired through practice, but they realise that this does not necessarily come naturally to all amateur singers. All of these points relate to the findings regarding preferred self-to-other ratio (SOR), choir formation, position and spacing (see chapter 4), as they may partly explain the impact that the singers' ability to hear each other has on confidence in the amateur choral setting.

Table 5.11. 'Through the flaps'

| |
|---|
| <p>You know what? Because I've always learnt to listen and learn by ear...through the flaps! [points to ears]...what I find distracting sometimes is when already the first time you play something or something, then people butt in and sing something, and sing it wrong. Because then you don't get it in right straight away. I think people should be asked to listen a couple of times before they start joining in, so we can all hear how it's <i>supposed</i> to be sung, before anyone actually starts singing it. FG2.B.35</p> |
| <p>It is a team thing [all agree], and you need to be able to listen, but it takes a lot of practise to be able to listen to the other people and still sing your part. [All agree.] FG2.K.54</p> |

On the whole, however, participants reported co-operative musical relationships with their fellow singers, and appreciated the opportunity to work as a team with the shared aim of creating a harmonious blend.

Table 5.12. ‘You’re not there to be a soloist’

I have enjoyed singing with the choir because it’s very fulfilling and it’s nice to be in a close harmony group [...] where you need to be very aware of what the other people are doing. You’re not there to be a soloist – you’re there to listen to other people and blend in with everybody. **FG1.X.2**

I think that’s what I meant by a different mind set between a soloist, and an ensemble singer. ‘Cause we know, that when we do a group, when we get the tenors or the sopranos and the baritones or tenors together, that we make a good sound. We know it. And the girls listen to us, and we listen to them, and we understand that, don’t we? So when you’re in the ensemble, you’re looking to balance and blend. **FG3.Q.17**

5.2.4. Support and Encouragement

That’s the thing with our group we all encourage each other. We all have different strengths haven’t we and I think that’s really nice. And that helps your confidence if you feel that other people are with you. **FG1.H.11**

All three focus groups and all sixteen individual interviewees talked at length about the various ways in which choral singers interact positively, providing mutual encouragement and moral support, and it was widely felt that this often boosted their confidence while rehearsing and performing (Table 5.13).

Table 5.13. ‘You will, you will...’

You know what I think’s nice. You know [soprano] stands next to me and I’m ever so nervous...saying, ‘I’ll never be able to do this – I can’t do this’, you know...But [she] always encourages me... she’s encouraging me all the time. ‘Cause I said the other night, ‘I can’t speak French, I’ll never be able to do this’, and she says, ‘You will, you will’. **FG1.N.11**

My encouragement has definitely come from you [to researcher/conductor], and also from everybody in the choir and in [operatic society]. They’d say ‘Ooh that sounded good, [singer’s name], when you did that one’. And that’s the bit that’s spurred me on. **FG3.N.65**

Well, you three [to conductor/researcher and two fellow basses] [encouraged me]. Plus other members of [operatic society], because when I came...I had very little experience. **FG3.B.66**

Support from other singers ranged from verbal encouragement (and, on occasions, appropriate physical contact to reinforce group cohesion) before and during

performances, to congratulation and affirmation after the event (Table 5.14). For example, S1, an experienced alto in a twenty-strong mixed voice choir, described receiving support when she doubted her own ability during a bout of pre-performance nerves, and then receiving positive reinforcement from her peers once she had successfully overcome her anxieties.

Table 5.14. ‘Go for it!’

| |
|---|
| A lot depends on who you’re with, as to whether you have the confidence to sort of actually say ‘Come on. We <i>do</i> know this. We can do it in the car. We can do it at home. We <i>can</i> do this’. S9.4 |
| You do, to some extent, bolster each other before you go on, you know. You might hold an elbow and say ‘Go for it, boy!’ or something like that. S13.38 |
| If it’s gone well we’ll sit down and go ‘Yes!’ In fact I said to [fellow alto], when we’d finished...I went ‘You won’t believe this’...‘cause when we went up to do the...it was ‘Sloop John B’ and I was like ‘I’m dreading this, I’m absolutely dreading this, because I <i>know</i> I just don’t know this’. And she was like ‘You’ll be fine!’ And then we came back and I went ‘I did it!’...And she went ‘Ooh, well done! Finally!’ [laughs] Or something like that. So we say things like that. S1.51 |

Positive feedback from fellow choir members, particularly from singers who were perceived as having more skill or experience, was seen as a valuable source of validation (Table 5.15). This helps to build individual self-efficacy for singing, as well as contributing to a supportive social learning environment. It can act as confirmation of the singer’s acceptance and integration as a member of the choral ‘team’ or ‘community’, as well as verification of their individual vocal ability.

Table 5.15. ‘Thumbs up’

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|--|
| I was querying a note or something, and [fellow singer] said ‘You ought to have the courage of your convictions’. She was being quite complimentary, in other words, you know - I was doing fine, I just needed to believe in it. S7.8 |
| When I came off the stage in February...and I joined the line...[alto] tapped me on the shoulder...all she did was tap me on the shoulder, and that was like a ‘thumbs up’- ‘That was good’. So that was good. S8.20 |
| I think they can make you feel <i>positive</i> ...If someone does a really good job, then we’ll say they’ve done a really good job... And the recognition coming from others, and you’re sort of like ‘Yeah, they think it’s OK too! I’m not completely doolally’. It’s a genuine thing. S10.18 |

5.2.5. Trust and Rapport

It's confidence in who you're performing with. Knowing that *they* know, and that they're going to do what they *should*. **S12.25**

Trust was seen as particularly important in facilitating the collaborative environment in which effective learning can take place. Concerns about whether singers can trust their fellow performers to remember stage entries and exits, musical cues, and their own vocal lines were common and were cited as likely to affect confidence levels (Table 5.16).

Table 5.16. 'Are they going to get it right?'

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|---|
| When you're sharing the stage with another choir and you've got to come on and off, and you don't feel confident that people are going to move in the right direction, or that they're going to get on with it – that they're going to sort of stand there [laughs]...It's sometimes quite obvious that some people haven't remembered what's been said to them, haven't been listening, or have just completely forgotten what's been said. And you feel nervous because <i>they're</i> not doing what you expect them to. FG2.K.44 |
| I'd <i>have</i> to be very aware and <i>very</i> confident that I knew exactly what was happening, and that everybody else knew exactly what was happening, because if it was to fall apart, I'd then just zip it, because I can't then pick it up. S1.18 |
| I'm a person that probably would tend to worry if somebody's a bit shaky, you're thinking 'Ooh, is it all going to fall apart any minute?' [laughs] and you're a bit tense because of that. Maybe one of the sections was not so good on that at rehearsal and, you know, you're a bit tense, thinking 'Oh, are they going to get it this time?' S6.1 |

The rapport that can develop as singers work together regularly within a particular choir was widely valued by the interviewees in this study (Table 5.17). For some singers this led to feelings of sufficient trust and security to accept guidance and constructive criticism from respected team members.

Table 5.17. Rapport and ‘helping each other’

The rapport is good, and that’s important as well, isn’t it? So why should we criticise? ‘Cause we all get it wrong. In fact, it’s the opposite...We’re not there to criticise each other, we’re there to help each other, and therefore if somebody *does* get it wrong...and [tenor’s] pointed out stuff that I’ve missed, and I’ve said ‘You’re right, I have missed that’. And [another tenor’s] done the same. Or [the latter] will admit that, you know, he’s got the timing wrong, or something. So it’s about helping each other, isn’t it? [...] To build each other’s confidence by working together rather than being self-critical. **S8.30**

I like to be with the people I rehearsed with, because you build a rapport, I think, and particularly one friend, we always stand together, because you get this [mimes nudging each other], and then she’ll go ‘Mmm. That wasn’t very good’. She’s quite outspoken. She’ll say it. ... She’ll go ‘The woman next to me stopped singing!’ [laughs]... But we *have* been singing together for *all* these years, next to each other, really, with just a small break when I gave up a little bit. So we do know each other very well. **S9.28**

5.2.6. Reciprocal Peer Learning

I love the [whispers] ‘Tell me what it was. Can you help me on that? Lah my bit.
I got lost – lah that to me!’ **S9.30**

S13, an experienced bass in a long-established chamber choir, explicitly developed the idea of learner to learner feedback based on trust, affinity and familiarity (Table 5.18). His comments implicitly embraced the concept of choir rehearsals as learning experiences, with the conductor as teacher, and certain singers contributing to the learning process.

Table 5.18. ‘Two-way traffic’

I know his voice. I *trust* him. We like each other! [laughs] This is a tenor. And I nudge him and say ‘You made a balls there!’ or something like that [laughs]. And he does to me as well, I may hasten to add. It’s a two-way traffic. That’s what learning’s about, isn’t it? **S13.16**

This theme of peer learning was expanded by other participants (Table 5.19), and was clearly seen as a reciprocal process.

Table 5.19. Learning from each other

It's quite nice to have people who know what they're singing on either side, because if I'm not quite sure I can actually learn from them. **S7.6**

Certainly in places like summer schools and workshops, everybody supports everybody else, in a sort of a quiet way. They're watching you and learning from you, and you're watching them and learning from them. And it's all very comfortable, and confidence-boosting. **S16.12**

Practical help from peers was described by many participants as being provided in a number of performance aspects (Table 5.20). These included help with the pronunciation and memorization of words; working out some of the more complex rhythms in choral works; reminders of melody and harmony lines; and, at times, interpreting the conductor's use of musical jargon.

Table 5.20. Text, timing, terminology and tuning

When I'm learning a song [...] there'll be members who know it, or at least know the words, so I like to be near them at the start at least, just to get a handle on the words, 'cause they never sound as they do when they're written, so that's quite helpful. **S10.11**

Sometimes I will count for us both and we'll get the timing. This last one was a lot of counting! And we were doing it, and we were going 'Right, we're going to get it right'. And I would start this [tapping beat], and we'd sing together, and the two of us would give it, you know [laughs] and feel we did it the best we could do. **S9.28**

I often find myself turning to [bass] and saying [whispers] 'How does this one go?' And he whispers back, saying 'I don't know. Ask *him!*' [points to where next singer stands] **S4.19**

I can say to her 'I don't know what that means. What's he [conductor] talking about?' And she'll say 'This is....' Or save it to the end and tell me what it is I'm not getting. And then she will equally go 'Don't know what he's talking about? What's that?' **S9.28**

5.2.7. Team Leaders and Role Models

Everybody's always jostling to get near the good singers! **S15.9**

Many participants discussed the importance, in terms of confidence building and musical development, of learning from other singers. For this reason, their preference for a particular position within the choir is often influenced by the perceived relative skill of some of the singers (Table 5.21). The majority of singers expressed a preference for surrounding themselves with stronger, more experienced, or more confident singers.

Table 5.21. 'People who know what they're singing'

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|--|
| It's quite nice to have people who know what they're singing on either side, because if I'm not quite sure I can actually learn from them. S7.6 |
| It's nice to feel that you've got some good solid singers around you. S6.19 |

S6 and S7 (Table 5.21) described learning from peers in a way that can be directly related to the concept of situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1991). These descriptions of learning from others can be interpreted as experiencing a kind of choral 'apprenticeship' in which, by becoming gradually initiated into this community of practice, newcomers learn from 'old timers' (Wenger 1998). This highlights the fact that, for amateur singers, learning is not simply imposed by the conductor; it also emerges as part of the dynamic between fellow choristers, and is an integral part of the communal, shared experience of choral life.

Amongst these amateur choral singers, there was considerable awareness of their reliance upon more experienced or more competent performers. Their perception of a choral 'pecking order' extended into friendly rivalry between some of the men (Table 5.22). This was seen as encouraging higher vocal attainment, and

therefore beneficial to the performance. It could also be argued that this good-humoured competition functions as a distraction from performance nerves. Confidence may then be developed as the singer becomes aware that they are improving their performance by trying to match that of their neighbouring role model.

Table 5.22. *Lifting the game*

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|--|
| <p>If I sing next to [bass], it's a bit of a competition as well. 'Cause I don't want to be <i>outsung</i> by [him], you know [laughs]. I think it lifts my game when I'm stood next to [him], definitely, 'cause I think, you know, he's a really good male singer and I'd <i>like</i> to think that I could sing as well as him. I don't think I can, but I'd <i>like</i> to think I could. And therefore, you know, I think it just ups the game a bit...I think it affects all of it, you know. Certainly I think I sing louder. 'Cause he's <i>very</i> loud. Well, he's not overly loud but he's got a very big tone, very rounded sound too, and I think <i>I</i> sing louder when I'm stood next to him...It does help me with my tone and my pitch as well, I think. I just concentrate more. Yeah, I do. S4.10-11</p> |
|--|

All three focus groups and the majority of individual interviewees described their reliance on help from particular fellow singers (Tables 5.21-5.30). Certain singers seem to become implicitly acknowledged as unelected but influential leaders, and are relied upon due to such characteristics as having a strong voice; reliable intonation; an ability to hold the melodic line or retain the harmony; being confident about starting notes and entries; relative competence when sight-reading; dependable recall in performance; or a combination of these advantages. The role of team leader seems to evolve, almost organically, based upon the other singers' perceptions of their experience, performance quality, skills and confidence.

These 'key' singers emerged as being of great importance to many participants, and their presence was seen as contributing towards the confidence of the singers around them. Focus Group 1 painted a vivid picture of the interaction between singers, as they 'lean' on each other for musical and moral support (Table 5.23). In Focus Group 2, one of the participants addressed a fellow singer, acknowledging her more

assured colleague's help with her harmonies, and recognising the confidence that this gives her during rehearsing and performing. The male singers in Focus Group 3 had an extended discussion about who relies on whom, which became almost circular, as they described the reciprocal process that takes place (see Table 5.20). They also made it clear that they aspire to equal the skill of fellow singers who are seen as more competent, and that some of these singers become role models within the choir. The interaction between FG3.N and FG3.B. (Table 5.23) demonstrated that these 'leaders' are not necessarily more experienced, or longer-standing members of the particular ensemble, but might have advantages such as sight-reading or memorization skills, and reliable intonation and accuracy.

Table 5.23. Starting notes and staying on track

| |
|---|
| We've done it quite often...sort of lean in, and we know that [alto] will have the right note. We know when one another has gone a bit wrong and we chivvy one another along. FG1.N.35 |
| You're very confident in what you're singing [to fellow alto], and you will always start on the right note. I always feel that maybe I <i>won't</i> , so if you're standing next to me, or [alto] is standing near by, then I know that if I do falter at any time, I can get back on track because I can hear somebody who's singing the right note. FG2.K.41 |
| FG3.N.15: Actually, having <i>you</i> there [to bass] in the choir really helps me. It really does. It helps me just maintain...get the right notes or whatever, 'cause I'm subject to straying, and you're consistent. FG3.B: Well, I'm still learning at the moment. FG3.N: Yeah, but even from day one, you come in and you're on the notes, and that helps me. FG3.15 |

When discussing their position within the choir relative to the other singers, all three focus groups raised the subject of unofficial 'team leaders' in the context of learning notes in rehearsal and as a contributory factor in performing confidently. The participants in Focus Group 3 were particularly eloquent when discussing this facet of the choir and its significance in terms of confidence building (Table 5.24).

Table 5.24. 'Rocks' and 'anchors'

It's very helpful to have a *rock*, you know, within the group, that you can latch on to...I think you *do* need that someone in a particular piece, who *knows* what they're doing... it's good to have that rock. It gives you confidence. **FG3.C.16**

If we don't have an anchor there, and it's up and down a bit, I get quite disheartened with that. **FG3.N.23**

For some singers the need to be near an implicitly identified sectional 'leader' affects where they opt to sit (Table 5.25), assuming that there is some freedom of choice about this.

Table 5.25. 'A good lead'

I like being on the front row [...] because the lady next but one to me is good [laughs] and I can hear...she's a good lead. **S7.6**

The theme of identifying and depending upon certain singers who become the sectional 'rock' or 'anchor' (Table 5.24) was continued in eleven of the sixteen individual interviews. It became clear that these 'team leaders' are identified by their peers based upon criteria such as reliability of intonation and pitch memory (Tables 5.23-5.26). They are sometimes more experienced singers or longer-serving choir members, but not always, as their skill level is often a more important determinant of their value as a role model or informal mentor within the team (Table 5.26).

Table 5.26. 'Newer' but 'more reliable'

I mean, if I stood next to [second bass], say, who's new to the choir but he's very accomplished, and he's got a good ear, and I think he can hold his note, then it would make it a lot easier for me. I stand next to a guy who, erm...now he doesn't stand *exactly* next to the tenors, but he's more easily led in that direction. And then the guy to my right, I guess is...relatively new, a lot newer than me, but he's coming along and he's more reliable as well, you know. It *does* make a difference who I stand next to... If someone's really confident and can hold the note, then I will hold my notes as well. **S4.10**

The presence of a strong singer with reliable intonation can help to counteract the distraction provided by less accurate neighbours, which helps to build confidence in the other team members (S4, Table 5.26). Their own confidence level can also have an impact on the singers around them, partly due to emotional contagion (Falkenberg et al., 2008), and partly due to positive modelling, both in musical and affective terms.

The effect that these leaders can have on the confidence of the individual singer (particularly when trying to recall a starting note for an entry), and on the collective self-efficacy of the section, was made explicit (Table 5.27).

Table 5.27. Humming the note

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|---|
| <p>I think you do build confidence by singing with the people around you [...] when the others, say the altos and sopranos are singing and we're gonna come in, I've heard [tenor] just hum a note, our first note, and – there's not many I struggle with, but there's a couple that I <i>do</i> struggle with, to come in right – so that's a confidence builder. S8.29-30</p> |
|---|

H11 (Table 5.28) suggests that these 'leaders' are often apparently unaware of their informal leadership position or, in some cases, reluctant to take credit for their influence within the section or the choir as a whole. However, they are sometimes more confident about requesting extra help from the choral director. Although these roles are not part of the formal organisation of the amateur choir, as section leaders would be in a professional orchestra, there is a tendency for more self-assured singers to act as a 'spokesperson' for their vocal section. There is also a sense that comfort may be derived from realising that even the informal 'team leader' might need extra help at times, which S11 interprets as a mitigating factor in his evaluation of his own competence.

Table 5.28. 'Looking to the leaders'

I suppose to a great extent we do look to [first bass]. He's been doing it a long time and he's got a damn good bass voice. And so, consequently, you tend to, I suppose, think of him as our leader, if you like. He would never want to sound that way. If you said it to him, he'd say 'Oh, don't be so damn soft!' He wouldn't see it that way. But it's like somebody who's been doing a job for a long, long time. You'd think to yourself 'Well, he knows what he's doing'...I mean, there are occasions when we're rehearsing and he'll say 'Can we do so and so again because we're struggling with that bass part', and I think to myself 'Well, if [he] is struggling then I'm *bound* to be struggling as well'.

S11.21

Some of those who realised that they had been informally identified as unofficial team leaders reported deriving some of their own confidence from the knowledge that they contribute in this way, and from recognition of their skills by their peers (Table 5.29). It therefore seems that the confidence building nature of the team leader/follower dyad is reciprocal. S10 recognised that her leadership role was not based on experience but upon other qualities, including self-assurance and general 'musicality'.

Table 5.29. Peer recognition and confidence

Amongst my group of singers – [the] tenor section – there are varying degrees of understanding of musicality, shall we say, so I like to know that at least a few of us have got it...'Cause I'm quite bossy and I'll tell them to be quiet or, you know, 'Not yet!' [laughs] 'Wait!'...The fact that I've only been there for such a short time and they're already looking to me is quite complimentary, I guess. **S10.9**

Although some participants discussed the disconcerting effects of singers who didn't blend or sang too loudly (Tables 5.10 and 5.37), it was also clear that the 'key' singers need to be able to create enough volume for their peers to hear them, in order to provide effective musical and moral support. This reliance on team leaders and role models in amateur choirs partly explains their preference for closer spacing which enables them to hear each other clearly (see Chapter 4). This is in opposition to

previous research involving participants who were more formally trained (Daugherty, 1999, 2003; Ternström, 1994, 1999).

It was felt that strong singers, in terms of volume as well as skill, help to encourage others to 'sing out' more confidently (Table 5.30). S12 also made the point that he wasn't as concerned as he might be about missing notes when he knew that the stronger singers would cover up any gaps in the performance. He also felt that their presence reduced his 'nerves'.

Table 5.30. 'A bit of strength in us'

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|---|
| I like it if somebody with a strong voice like you [to soprano] or [alto] or [second alto] is somewhere near, so that when we come to sing in a part where there's only three or four of us singing, that I know there's a bit of strength in us. FG2.K.41 |
| No nerves or anything...I had [bass] one side of me and [bass] the other side, so any notes I didn't hit they covered it up anyway. S12.6 |

Where opportunities for solos are available, singers may also be encouraged to sing out by strong soloists (Table 5.31).

Table 5.31. 'Barnstorming'

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| He sort of barnstormed when he got the solo bit [laughs] but nobody would have expected him to do any different. But having him do that, I noticed that everybody was doing it, even when we did the repeats – we were singing that top note and holding it better, and so again it's been a positive experience. S5.24 |
|--|

This kind of modelling was cited as being a useful part of peer learning and confidence building, as well as being an inspirational factor in the decision to continue singing (Table 5.32) or to develop an amateur performance 'career' (Stebbins, 1996).

Table 5.32. Positive role models

I think one of the advantages of the male voice choir was that when we did concerts we used to have a tenor soloist, and a baritone soloist, and a bass soloist, plus all the choir music...There was one guy from Wales, and he was *absolutely* superb. It was one of those things where you sat there listening to him, and you thought 'God, I wish I could sing like that!' 'Cause he used to be so good, you know...And that's what I was doing in the [male voice choir], 'cause I was trying to be as good as that baritone.

FG3.Q.14

I always want to be as consistent as [bass], singing... I know your voice is stronger than mine [to fellow bass]. I'd *love* to be able to sing as well as [bass]! **FG3.N.15**

5.2.8. Absence and Displacement

The influence of informal team leaders on morale as well as on performance quality is felt as much by their absence, on occasions, as by their presence (Table 5.33).

Table 5.33. Missing links

In the male voice choir, some are....If there are *key* people missing, they tend to get a bit lost, as we do in the second tenors [laughs], if we've got a few key people missing.

S6.3

[Tenor] is very good. And [baritone]. They're very loud! [laughs] We miss them when they're not there! **S12.4**

The presence of a strong lead can clearly make a great difference to the individual singer's sense of security, especially in relation to intonation, finding starting notes and making timely entries. The lack of such a lead can mean that the singers either miss entries or simply start to doubt themselves (Tables 5.33-5.35).

Table 5.34. Cues and 'coat tails'

Oddly enough, at our concert... we *completely* missed our entry [laughs] and [conductor] looked at us as if to say 'Where the hell are you?' I don't know why, but we *all* just blanked out! It was odd. And that comes back to having people around you...Subconsciously you're looking for your leader to come in, and it didn't happen!

S11.21

Well, standing next to someone who you know is going to pitch the note right and come in at the right time [laughs] is *good* for your confidence, 'cause you can sort of go along on their coat tails! But someone who just doesn't come in – I start to think 'Was I wrong? Can they only hear me?' **S15.13**

S11 (Table 54) described the phenomenon of a whole vocal section missing a cue because, for some unspecified reason, the unofficial section leader failed to start singing at that point, which illustrates the singers' dependence upon these individuals. S15 contrasted the sense of security and self-confidence derived from a strong lead with the unease and sense of exposure that can ensue if a singer feels unsupported by his or her neighbours.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the unsettling effect, particularly for less confident singers, of changes in layout or position between rehearsal and performance, with little opportunity to adjust to the unfamiliar circumstances in the venue, can be dramatic. The new findings related to social learning, presented in this chapter, indicate that this is largely due to their reliance on the more confident or more competent singers that they may be used to having around them, as well as the emotionally disruptive effect of reducing the sense of rapport and familiarity if regular neighbours are displaced.

Table 5.35. 'I can't see her mouth!'

| |
|---|
| <p>Week in, week out, everyone sits in the same place, for the rehearsal. Then suddenly – dress rehearsal – 'Ooh! Totally different!'...So that person that you know always gets that entry – 'I know <i>she'll</i> do it' – you can at least see her or hear her. And it gives you a little bit more confidence. And it's not <i>there</i> on the performance, 'cause she's gone somewhere else – she's down there. And I can't see her mouth! And that actually, for a nervous singer, is quite something really. S9.4-5</p> |
|---|

S9 (Table 5.35) described the uncertainty caused by sitting in unaccustomed positions; being surrounded by different people; being divided from regular, familiar and reliable singers; and losing the sense of support from her usual neighbours, particularly when separated from her usual team leader or role model. All of these factors can have a serious impact on confidence during performance.

A change of environment can cause distractions, both acoustically and in terms of disrupting individual placement preferences. Positioning therefore becomes a priority for some singers, partly due to their reliance on particular leaders who provide musical and moral support. For these reasons the individual's position within the choir can become a serious concern on the day of the performance, especially if new configurations have not been planned or practised in advance. Consequently, there can be fierce competition for seats at dress rehearsals and performances, especially for those who are less confident and keen to ensure that they position themselves close to supportive colleagues (S15, Table 5.36). The emotional investment in sitting in preferred positions can, at times, lead to stress and friction between singers (S9, Table 5.36).

Table 5.36. 'A jostle for places'

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|---|
| When we rehearse we all always sit in the same place, but when we do a performance we have to be configured differently, and then it is a bit of a jostle for places. I mean, people get there half an hour or three quarters of an hour early, just so that they can have a good place. S15.10 |
| It's appalling. But it's still the same. You know, like we go now, and save these rotten seats, and I go early because there's three of us that are as tall as me...and I just think I shall just go and save a row. And people argue and 'How many are you saving?' and 'Why are you saving?... And we kind of share the load, but people come and say [squeals] 'How many are <i>you</i> saving?!' S9.16 |

5.2.9. Clashes and Conflicts

You get the singers who, when a mistake is made, they're turning round or pointing it out to you, visibly. What I call, '*rude* performers'. They irritate me as well. I *know* when I've made a mistake. **S14.41**

There are occasions when social or task-oriented interactions within the choral context are not as harmonious as the majority of the above examples suggest. Singers may clash for personal or artistic reasons, and internal politics can arise in almost any group

setting, sometimes rendering the choral learning experience less than idyllic. Problems, in terms of group cohesion and choral sound, were recognised as arising from singers who did not function well as part of the vocal team. Loud, inaccurate singers are obviously distracting (Table 5.37), but participants reported that this can also affect the mood of their neighbours during rehearsal and performance, sometimes causing them to abandon their own vocal line in despair.

Table 5.37. Loud, inaccurate singers

| |
|---|
| I get really frustrated because when [soprano]...if she thinks she's right, then she sings it really forcefully and, again, sometimes when I know it's <i>not</i> right, and it affects the altos, particularly in the Madrigal, I give up, because I can't sing against that...so I just don't sing and mime. S1.14 |
| It can affect my <i>mood</i> , if I can't actually sing in tune because somebody's under par and singing loudly, and you want to say 'Shut up!'... <i>Very frustrating.</i> S14.23 |

Other sources of disturbance include singers who talk too much during rehearsals, and even performances (Table 5.38), to the extent that it becomes difficult to concentrate and learn.

Table 5.38. Disruption and distraction

| |
|---|
| I personally find it quite off-putting and irritating when the conductor is trying to go through parts, or trying to just even talk, and there are groups of people that are talking all the time. And I've <i>even</i> had that in a concert situation, where they've actually been <i>talking</i> behind me, and it <i>really</i> irritates me. I'd have to be like a school teacher 'Will you be quiet?!' I think that is very disruptive...and it can be really annoying when people are trying to learn their parts, or they're trying to listen to what you're saying or whatever – where you have to <i>constantly</i> repeat things. And I think sometimes that's why certain groups don't get their parts very well. It's because they're not actually listening. S3.35 |
| I stand next to [soprano], and sometimes...I'm distracted [laughs]. You know what she's like. She's such a big laugh...But I don't like messing around if it's the real thing, you know. I don't like sort of being distracted. S2.5 |

Some singers even provide a running commentary on proceedings, which, in the case of S7's experience of this (Table 5.39), could be seen as some kind of passive-aggressive reaction to the conductor. Balancing 'choir discipline' with providing a favourable environment for collaboration and collective learning may be one of the most challenging aspects of choral direction, and this also clearly causes concern for some of the singers. Disruptive behaviour amongst choir members is an unwelcome distraction from the task of performing effectively and is bound to interfere with the achievement of flow and its associated benefits, such as increased self-confidence (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

Table 5.39. 'I can't concentrate'

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|---|
| <p>There's a lady who sits next to me quite often, who doesn't stop talking and tutting and muttering, and drives everybody bonkers...Excruciating irritation. Sometimes to the point where I can't concentrate on the music 'cause I'm waiting for her next rude comment...Oh, she comments on the conductor! You know, he sort of says 'Right, all stand', and then 'You may sit down', or stand, you know, 'cause you often <i>are</i> up and down – it depends which bit you're doing and stuff – and she'll make comments about him, you know. Just 'Can't he make his mind up?' or 'Up and down, up and down. It's ridiculous'. Just...she's really rude! [laughs] And I want to tell her to shut up. But so far I haven't. S7.8</p> |
|---|

A few participants had negative stories to tell about singers who criticised others, sometimes in a way that interfered with the smooth running of rehearsals (Table 5.40). This behaviour can be interpreted as undermining the conductor, as well as adversely affecting the concentration and confidence of those around them. Sometimes this can result in singers doubting their own accuracy or ability and, in the most extreme cases, those affected may decide to leave the choir.

Table 5.40. Criticism and interference

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|--|
| I know [bass] is a very good singer – I imagine he is anyway – he’s done a lot of stuff – and I’ve heard him make a couple of comments sometimes to the basses [laughs] and I think ‘Ooh, crikey. If he said that to me’... He was criticising the basses for a note. S8.31 |
| There have been a few comments about other singers within the choir, or they might say ‘Oh, you’re singing that wrong’ and it’s like ‘Well, we have a Musical Director to do that. It’s not <i>your</i> place to do it’. S10.11 |
| There was this one lady in [choral society], who is not a very nice lady, and she always kept her finger in her ear [demonstrates]. I’m sitting next to her and she kept her finger in her ear like that. She really obviously was making the point that I was disturbing her, and she kept saying ‘It’s a D, it’s a D’, or whatever it was. So I’d think ‘You are so <i>rude</i> ’. I mean, so rude. So I left...I just assumed I was in the wrong. S7.39-40 |

Adverse effects on confidence, along with increased self-doubt or discomfort, were also reported when other singers do not use their skills to enhance the performance of the team as a whole, or perhaps use their ability and experience to intimidate other singers rather than to encourage or support them during rehearsals and performances (Table 5.41).

Table 5.41. ‘Prima donnas’

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|---|
| FG.1.F: One thing that we do have in choir is a lady who’s a prima donna; always hits the notes exactly, she thinks! So you’re standing at the side of her and you think ‘Is it her or is it me?’ FG.1.N: I stand next to you!!! FG.1.F: No it’s not [in <i>our</i> choir!] [laughter] It’s very off putting because you get a snide look and you think, ‘Is it me? No I don’t think so.’ Then everybody says afterwards, ‘She was really flat, wasn’t she?’ And you think ‘Phew!’... You doubt yourself because she’s been singing for years and years and as I said is very confident, will pick up any script and read it. But very often it isn’t you but you always doubt yourself. FG1.23 |
| We’ve joined with other choirs and sang at [concert hall] on several occasions. There was one particular occasion...it was round about the millennium time...They had the [male voice choir] from [city] and they made us feel a little bit inferior. Do you know what I mean? ‘You’re not quite good enough to be with us’ sort of an impression. The majority of them were OK but there was one or two who you felt...You could see...‘Why are we singing with <i>you</i> ?’ So I perhaps didn’t enjoy it...You felt uncomfortable. S11.2-3 |

5.3 THEMATIC SUMMARY

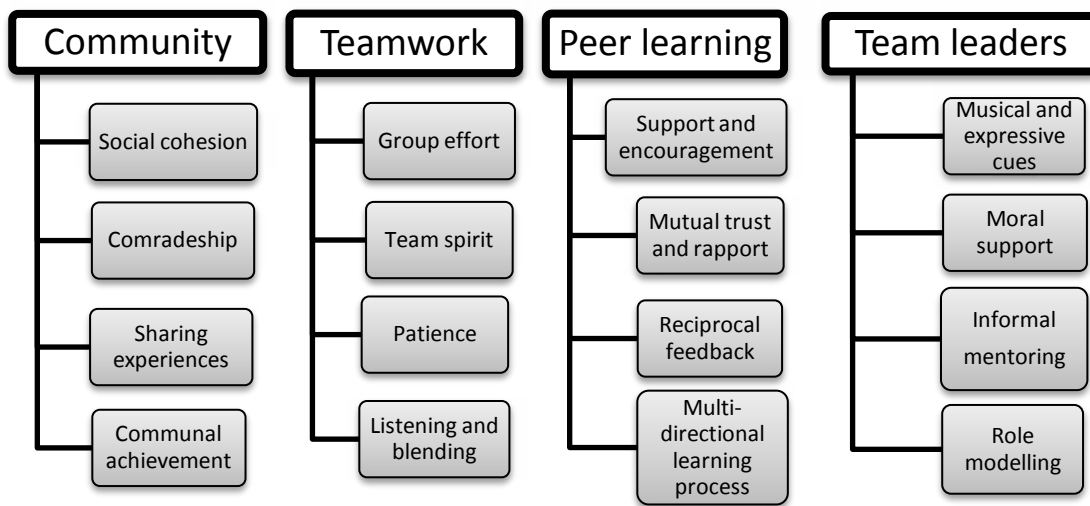
The superordinate theme of collaboration includes the subordinate themes of community, teamwork, reciprocal peer learning and the role of choral 'team leaders' (see Figure 7). The choir as a collective entity held great significance for many participants, in terms of encouraging a sense of camaraderie, social support and bonding. There was an appreciation of the opportunity for shared experiences provided by choral singing, and an acknowledgment that a choir, in terms of collective achievement and social cohesion, is much more than the sum of the individual contributions from the singers.

Descriptions of the choir as a team recurred throughout this study, and the importance of viewing choral performance as a group effort was emphasised. Many examples were given of team spirit, mutual support and encouragement, and collaborative learning. These peer interactions were seen as important components in the process of developing individual and group efficacy.

There was a common recognition that sectional team leaders were often informally identified by their fellow singers, and that they were relied upon for moral support, musical and expressive cues, informal mentoring and peer modelling. The subordinate themes relating to choral collaboration suggest a multi-directional process of group learning in this context, and highlight the importance of the role of fellow choir members in enhancing choral confidence. This reliance on other singers for emotional support and encouragement, as well as musical cues, has links with the participants' observations on the expression and development of confidence through non-verbal communication (see chapter 3), and may also partly explain the findings related to choir configuration (see chapter 4).

The collaborative factors described in this section will be further elaborated upon in the following discussion of my findings and their relationship to existing models of collective learning.

Figure 7. Collaborative factors in choral confidence



5.4. DISCUSSION

5.4.1. Peer Learning and Mutual Support

The main themes emerging from the data include the collaborative role of fellow singers as an adjunct to the leadership of the conductor, and the importance of reciprocal peer learning. Subordinate themes include the value of cohesion, comradeship and community; the singers' sense of the choir as a team; positive feedback from other singers; support and encouragement from peers; peer modelling and informal mentoring; and the importance of rapport and trust amongst the singers, in terms of facilitating social learning and group confidence.

A significant recurring theme amongst the singers in this study was the dependence on their peers, especially the widely acknowledged but unelected 'team leaders' (also see Bonshor, 2013b), who are often perceived as stronger singers, more confident performers, or more accomplished sight-readers. These informally recognised 'leaders' are relied upon by the singers around them for accuracy in terms of intonation, holding the vocal line and responding to cues on time, particularly in situations when sectional entries are exposed.

The self-professed reliance on particular peers or unofficial sectional 'team leaders' may account for the fact that choir configuration and the individual's position within the choir has emerged as being particularly important to these participants (see Chapter 4). The importance, for these amateur singers, of hearing each other, which is facilitated by closer spacing, may also be related to their reliance upon the singers around them, and upon these sectional leaders in particular (also see Bonshor, 2013a). Fellow singers were credited with informal mentoring and modelling, offering verbal

encouragement, and providing opportunities for peer learning. All of this may reflect the fact that the current sample consists of adult amateur performers who, whilst they are often very experienced choral singers, have rarely received any advanced intensive or formal training, compared with the previously studied 'music majors' who are self-evidently highly trained musicians (Daugherty, 2003; Ekholm, 2000). This difference in training may mean that the interviewees in the current study feel more need to gain musical and moral support from stronger, or more self-confident, adjacent singers, as well as from those who are viewed as more competent in terms of sight-reading ability, accuracy of intonation, or reliability of melodic recall.

5.4.2. Communities of Practice and Group Flow

The social and musical interactions between the amateur choral singers in this study can be directly related to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) flow theory, which has been applied to optimal performance in musical ensembles. Group flow is 'a property of the entire group as a collective unit' which can help individual members to attain their own state of flow (Sawyer, 2006: 158). During group flow musicians report feeling that everything is coming together naturally, that co-performers can anticipate each other's actions, and that they can achieve more during collaborative efforts than they might achieve individually (Sawyer, 2006). Such experiences are likely to affect confidence positively, in terms of the group's perception of the success of the particular performance, and their general group efficacy. Group flow depends upon and emerges from the interactions between the performers, so it is likely that facilitating a collaborative environment will have positive results in terms of collective confidence building. Group flow theory has been applied to social learning and group dynamics in

the classroom, and a collaborative approach to education has been advocated, allowing students to be more involved in the learning process rather than reacting passively to the more traditional, teacher-led approach:

The teacher leads the classroom in group improvisations, rather than acting as a solo 'performer' in front of the class 'audience'. Students become socialized into classroom communities of practice, in which the whole class collaborates in each student's learning. (Sawyer, 2006: 163)

As evidenced by the emergent themes presented in this chapter, adult amateur choral singers often adopt and value a collective approach. If, in the above quotation, we were to substitute 'conductor' for 'teacher', 'singers' for 'students', and 'choir' for 'class', we would have an excellent description of what can happen in a collaborative choral rehearsal in which singers and conductors contribute to the learning process. According to these new findings, the application of the concept of the community of practice (CoP) to the amateur choral environment is therefore appropriate, and this approach to understanding social learning may consequently be of use when building choral confidence (also see Bonshor, 2014). Although a choir might not always be seen primarily as an educational institution, as a school or college might be, it is an environment in which the prime target is to learn, whether it is the acquisition of new repertoire, the improvement of performance skills, or the integration of new members as they learn to become choral singers. The conductor has the most obvious didactic role in this environment. However, social elements, including peer learning, mutual support and encouragement, and modelling and informal mentoring, also play a part in the learning experience. The results of this study demonstrate that effective, socially supported learning can make a significant contribution to individual and collective confidence in choral ensembles.

5.4.3. Choral Apprenticeship and Mastery

The data presented in this chapter have shown that situated learning is not limited to choral novices, confirming that learning is part of the experience of all members of the CoP (Wenger, 2011). My findings reveal that 'masters' can be fellow singers, with varying degrees of experience, as well as conductors. Reciprocal, collaborative learning amongst singers is therefore of more importance than might be imagined from the traditional, stereotypical view of the choir being passively led and taught by the conductor.

The current study has demonstrated the applicability of situated learning theory to the choral environment and confirmed some of the informal observations I have made during my work as a choral director. A practical case study of one singer's progress will therefore be threaded through the remainder of this discussion, in order to exemplify the application of the concept of the community of practice to the evolution of an individual choir member (Tables 5.42-5.45). This case study has been drawn directly from observations made during my experience as a conductor, which were recorded in my research journal during the induction of a novice singer into one of the choirs I was directing.

This observational case study will be presented in instalments, for illustrative purposes only, as it is not part of the formally collected and analysed data presented in this thesis. It is used here to provide an additional longitudinal perspective on the collaborative aspects of the development of confidence amongst choral singers.

This real-life example is designed to provide a useful link between my own first-hand observations, the findings emerging from the data, and the theoretical frameworks elucidated in this chapter.

Table 5.42. Case Study Part 1: Katrina, the ‘Newcomer’

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|--|
| Katrina had received no musical education, and had no prior experience of singing with other people until a year ago, when she joined one of the female choirs that I conduct. She was not confident in pitching at all, and constantly doubted her own accuracy. Her vocal tone was pleasant, but she habitually sang in the male tenor range, and initially found it difficult to pitch alongside the other female singers. Learning and remembering a harmony line was a serious challenge for Katrina, as she tended to drift towards the melody, albeit singing the tune an octave lower than the sopranos, or occasionally in another key entirely. Even matching the starting note was difficult for her at first, and she often completely lost her bearings, subsequently exhibiting all the signs of a predictable loss of confidence. |
|--|

It seems that the master-apprentice relationship amongst tailors and their trainees, as explored in studies of situated learning, can be interpreted as analogous to the internal relationships within an amateur choir:

Even in the case of the tailors, where the relation of apprentice to master is specific and explicit, it is not this relationship, but rather the apprentice’s relations to other apprentices and even to other masters that organize opportunities to learn; an apprentice’s own master is too distant, an object of too much respect, to engage with in awkward attempts at a new activity (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

My findings have shown that, in a choir, there are similarly complex interrelationships between singers and their peers rather than a simple conductor-singer dyad, and that these aspects of the choral community of practice can contribute towards the development of individual competence and self-efficacy.

Table 5.43. Case Study Part 2: Katrina, the ‘Apprentice’

Sometimes Katrina found it helpful to stand nearer to me so that I could help her to pitch, since her tone more closely matched my timbre than that of the female singers. However, she was not entirely happy with this, as she wanted to sing along with her peers. Fortunately, two of the more experienced altos took her under their wing, and discreetly helped her to adjust her pitch towards theirs. When learning a new song, Katrina’s nearest neighbours, could often be observed gently gesturing ‘higher’ or ‘lower’. Katrina would respond with a smile as she corrected herself, and her improvements were met with enthusiastic encouragement from the other singers. She became sufficiently self-aware to seek help with her tuning, usually requested with subtle eye contact between herself and her fellow singers. This assistance extended to retiring to a quiet corner during tea breaks, to help Katrina with extra practice of her part, and to record the relevant harmony lines on her mobile phone to help her to revise at home.

A CoP ‘offers exemplars (grounds and motivation for learning activity), including masters, finished products, and more advanced apprentices in the process of becoming full practitioners’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Based on my findings, this is an apt description of some of the transactions that occur within the learning environment of a choral rehearsal. ‘Masters’ can be conductors or experienced choristers acting as role models or mentors; ‘finished products’ are songs or performances; ‘more advanced apprentices’ might be singers who joined the choir earlier, and whose progress can be motivational and inspirational to relative newcomers. The acquisition of skills and experience leads to personal growth and increased self-confidence as singers start to become ‘masters’.

Table 5.44. Case Study Part 3: Katrina the ‘Master’

I realized that Katrina’s transformation into a confident choral singer was underway when, at a recent rehearsal, her two role models were absent. Katrina was singing the alto part with only one other singer (Vivienne, an experienced musician) and holding her line extremely well. At one point, Vivienne struggled to retain the harmony, as she had been absent for the previous two rehearsals. Katrina turned towards her so that Vivienne could hear her vocal line, and gestured to demonstrate the direction of some of the pitch changes. Vivienne and Katrina smiled at each other and sang together, their eyes shining and their voices soaring. Since then, Katrina has happily managed to participate fully and accurately in rehearsals during which she has been the only singer on her vocal line. She has also recently taken a new self-professed ‘non-singer’ under her wing, mentoring and encouraging this novice in the same way that she was nurtured when she first arrived.

The final part of my observational case study illustrates the journey that a newcomer in a choir can make from limited peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991), initially encountering resistance, opposition and tensions, before finally achieving full integration as an effective, confident and accepted member of the choral CoP.

Table 5.45. Case Study Part 4: Katrina, the ‘Full Member’

When Katrina first arrived, some of the other singers had privately expressed concern about her unreliability of intonation, and complained about the distraction this created. On several occasions, one or two singers strongly suggested that Katrina should be asked to leave. I resisted this, as my aim was for the choir to be as inclusive as possible. I asked the singers to be patient, as I knew that Katrina was thoroughly enjoying rehearsals, and I could see that she was beginning to make progress. I could also see that the support she was receiving from some of her peers was making a significant contribution to her growing self-confidence. Sure enough, over the following months, Katrina started to pitch increasingly accurately, and to learn her notes more quickly. As her confidence slowly increased, I was taken aback by the beauty of her vocal timbre, and it was clear that she was developing into a real asset to the choir. Gradually, she also started to risk singing a little higher, and her range began to extend sufficiently to enable her to venture into more conventional alto parts, and even, occasionally, to sing melody lines at the correct pitch. When learning new harmonies, she sometimes still needed a little extra help, which often came in the form of peer modelling and informal mentoring from her fellow singers. As time went by, the other singers frequently showed their appreciation of her progress, which further enhanced her confidence in her own ability. This newfound confidence, in turn, had a positive effect on her performance as she relaxed into her role as a competent and fully participating member of the choir.

The real-life journey of Katrina, originally a self-defined 'non-singer', through a gradual process of initiation into choir membership and full participation, illustrates the change of role from newcomer to 'old-timer' that occurred as she gained in experience, task mastery and confidence. This example encapsulates the concept of social learning, situated in CoPs, and demonstrates the life cycle of membership in a social learning environment. Newcomers can thus aspire to emulate the skills of the role models and informal mentors who have helped them on their way to full membership of their CoP, and will in time become 'old-timers' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) who can pass on their own skills to other learners.

5.4.4. Trust, Mutual Engagement and Self-Efficacy

The amateur singers in the current study placed a high value on trust, cohesion, familiarity, affinity, and rapport as prerequisites for offering and accepting feedback amongst peers. They specifically related these elements to effective reciprocal learning as part of the confidence-building process in the choral context. This directly relates to the concept of mutuality and trust as essential components of an effective CoP:

People must know each other well enough to know how to interact productively and who to call for help or advice. They must trust each other, not just personally, but also in their ability to contribute to the enterprise of the community, so they feel comfortable addressing real problems together and speaking truthfully. Through receiving and giving help, they must gain enough awareness of the richness of the community to expect that their contribution will be reciprocated in some way. (Wenger, 2000: 230)

There was some evidence in the data that, as well as socially supported learning and confidence-building support and encouragement, conflicts and tensions also exist within amateur choral ensembles. However, relationships between co-learners do not always need to be positive in order for effective learning to take place in CoPs. Although mutual engagement is a major component of a CoP (Wenger, 2000), homogeneity is not always necessary. Co-learners do not always need to get along with each other, or even to like each other, in order for effective learning to take place in the choral CoP. In fact, diversity can be a positive factor, as the tensions and conflicts, disagreements and challenges inherent in situations involving sustained group interactions can all be defined as modes of participation, and can contribute to the group learning process (Wenger 1998). Many choral group learning situations are likely to encompass at least some of the emotions, experiences and perceptions in this description of the reality of CoPs:

Mutual relations among participants are complex mixtures of power and dependence, pleasure and pain, expertise and helplessness, success and failure, amassment and deprivation, alliance and competition, ease and struggle, authority and collegiality, resistance and compliance, anger and tenderness, attraction and repugnance, fun and boredom, trust and suspicion, friendship and hatred (p. 77).

The discovery that amateur choirs function as CoPs, in which group processes can support the development of individual and collective confidence, has a strong connection with self-efficacy theory. Perceptions of self efficacy are malleable (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003), and can be changed by direct personal experience, modelling by others or verbal encouragement (Bandura, 1977). Direct personal experience is the most effective method of altering self-efficacy, whilst modelling by others is most effective if the models are similar to the observer, as fellow singers in a choir are likely

to be. The effectiveness of verbal persuasion depends upon the individual's perception of the credibility of the person delivering the encouragement, in terms of their expertise, prestige, assuredness and trustworthiness (Bandura, 1977). The current study has demonstrated that, in an amateur choir, there are opportunities for accessing all three of these approaches to improving perceived self-efficacy. As part of their induction into an effective choral CoP, novice singers gain confidence from acquiring practical experience, whilst observing and learning from their peers, and receiving verbal encouragement from trusted and respected fellow singers, as well as from the conductor.

The findings presented in this chapter have illustrated the aptness of the CoP as a lens through which to view the choral environment in relation to effective learning and confidence building. In the next chapter a more detailed exploration of verbal communication within the amateur choral environment will be undertaken, with particular reference to the impact of positive and negative feedback on individual and collective efficacy.

6. VERBAL COMMUNICATION

6.1. BACKGROUND

6.1.1. Feedback

All participants in the focus groups and interviews raised the subject of feedback, not only in terms of general support and encouragement from their peers (see Chapter 5), but also in terms of specific verbal feedback from audiences, family members, conductors, and fellow singers. This aspect of communication about their performances was found to have an impact on their confidence as choral singers in a number of ways, which will be discussed later in this chapter. In order to provide a framework for this section, there now follows an introductory review of some of the literature relating to the content, style and source of verbal feedback.

Many of the earlier studies cited in this chapter laid the foundations for more recent thinking on this subject, and have direct relevance to the themes emerging in this study. Most previous research on this subject has been intended to be applicable in an educational context, rather than in the sphere of adult leisure activities. However, much of this is still pertinent to my study, as choral singing shares many features with music teaching settings:

Everything involved in rehearsing and conducting can be characterized by a teaching paradigm. (Price and Byo, 2002: 336)

Feedback has been described as ‘one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement’ (Hattie and Timperley, 2007: 81), and the following definition is particularly relevant to learning in choral rehearsals and ensemble performances:

Feedback is [...] information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding...Feedback thus is a ‘consequence’ of performance. (Hattie and Timperley, 2007: 81)

6.1.2. Criticism and Praise

In the current study, the superordinate emergent theme of feedback was divided into two main categories by the majority of participants, as they largely focused on the contrasting effects of praise and criticism.

Praise consists of ‘positive evaluations made by a person of another’s products, performances or attributes’, which act as an important form of social reinforcement (Kanouse et al., 1981: 98). As well as having positive behavioural effects, praise also results in positive affect, which can make a significant contribution towards raising self-esteem in the recipient (Meyer, 1992).

Criticism can be divided into two categories. Constructive criticism is ‘specific in content, considerate in tone’, makes ‘no attributions concerning the causes behind the subjects’ poor performance’ and contains no threats (Baron, 1988: 200). Conversely, destructive criticism is more general in content, inconsiderate in tone, attributes poor performance to internal, personal factors, and sometimes includes threats. Participants in previous research have reported

more adverse effects on confidence after receiving destructive criticism than after constructive criticism or an absence of feedback, and these affective consequences often impair subsequent performance (p. 199). The resultant reduction in the recipient's sense of task mastery is likely to have a negative effect on self-efficacy, creating a downward spiral of diminishing confidence. However, constructive criticism does not have the same adverse effect, leading to the conclusion that 'it is not the delivery of negative feedback, per se, that produces such effects; rather, the manner in which such information is conveyed seems to play a crucial role' (p. 204).

6.1.3. Specificity of Feedback

Feedback is often more effective when it includes information on correct responses rather than incorrect ones (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). Unfortunately, music teachers' disapproval statements have sometimes been found to be more specific than their approval statements (Carpenter, 1988; Yarbrough and Price, 1989). This can be partly explained by the distinction between negative feedback that gives little information and that which suggests a course of remedial action for the student (Duke and Henninger, 1998). The latter has much in common with directive statements that are intended to indicate desired improvements in performance. In music rehearsals, the difference between negative feedback and directive statements can sometimes be unclear:

When there are frequent alternations between student performance trials and teacher verbalizations, as is the case in most music performance settings, each negative feedback statement may imply a direction to change some aspect of the performance. In other words, each specific negative feedback statement may imply a directive. Similarly, each specific directive to change some aspect of the performance may imply a negative feedback statement about the preceding trial. (p. 485)

Providing information on correct responses in order to facilitate performance improvement is an inherent component of positive feedback. Specific praise is more effective than general praise, as it provides more information about which aspects of performance have resulted in a positive evaluation and which aspects the assessor particularly values (Kanouse et al., 1981). The recipient is then in a better position to improve his or her performance, and may also value the praise more highly. 'Praise of the actor', focusing on the person carrying out the action, is interpreted as more general, whilst 'praise of the product', (which encompasses ephemeral performances as well as tangible objects) focuses on the action or its consequences, and is seen as more specific, and therefore more informative (Kanouse et al., 1981). Praise of the actor rather than the product can heighten evaluation apprehension, derived from anxieties about maintaining the performance standard. Conversely, praise of the product or performance rather than the actor can allow the recipient to derive more objective pleasure from his own work, 'in the same way that he might enjoy a good product produced by someone else' (p. 110).

Non-specific praise, especially if repeated too frequently, can become a habitual transition activity (Brophy, 1981), diluting the impact of the responses and leading to a loss of meaning for the recipients. This may be an occupational hazard for conductors due to the high level of repetition used in ensemble rehearsals (Biddlecombe, 2012). Some conductors try to counteract this by using higher

magnitude feedback, which is more intense and expressive in delivery (Madsen, 1990; Yarbrough, 1975; Yarbrough and Price, 1981), and this has had a measurable effect on performance in numerous musical contexts (Madsen and Duke, 1985; Yarbrough and Madsen, 1998).

Despite the abundance of research recommending specific praise in music education and choral rehearsals (Carpenter, 1988; Goolsby, 1997; Hendel, 1995; Yarbrough and Hendel, 1993; Yarbrough and Price, 1989), specificity in disapproval is still more common in practice, whilst positive feedback following specific negative feedback tends to be more general and lacks information about the nature of the improvements in performance (Biddlecombe, 2012). After an intervention experiment with professional conductors of school choirs and graduate university choirs, Biddlecombe concluded that more specific positive feedback in choral rehearsals is likely to assist learning, retention and mood.

6.1.4. Status and Standards

Specific praise helps to establish the trustworthiness and credibility of the evaluator, which in turn increases the value of the praise as a tool for enhancing perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Specificity establishes that the evaluator has particular standards, and that 'he is not merely proffering empty words designed to reassure or ingratiate' (Kanouse et al., 1981: 104). The credibility and status of evaluators are well established as important factors in the acceptance and value of praise, and the status of the praise-giver can be as influential as the content of the feedback (Catano, 1975, 1976; Stock 1978). In experimental conditions, praise from the researcher (perceived by the participants as a comparative expert) preceded improvements in performance,

whilst the effect of praise from a fellow participant was no more favourable than no praise (Catano, 1975). A hierarchy of credibility was established by comparing the effects of praise from the researcher, praise from an untrained peer, and praise from a peer whose expertise had been vouched for by the researcher:

Subjects receiving praise from a person in the role of an experimenter improved the most; when that same person assumed the role of a peer, his praise was less effective. Establishing the expertise, or credibility, of the peer resulted in a performance level, that while not as good as the one for experimenter's praise, did not significantly differ from it. (Catano, 1976: 1,285)

These experiments provided practical demonstrations of the different levels of self-efficacy derived from different sources of feedback, confirming that the perceived trustworthiness, expertise and status of the praise-giver are significant factors (Bandura, 1977). It is acknowledged, however, that the demand characteristics of the experimental situation and the relative roles of the experimenter and subjects in these studies may have complicated the results to some extent (Stock, 1978).

6.1.5. Individual Differences

A further complicating factor in the study of feedback is that various individual differences have been observed. In response to destructive criticism, some individuals subsequently increase their efforts, whilst others suffer losses of performance quality, motivation and self-efficacy as a result (Bandura and Cervone, 1986). Likewise the way in which recipients interpret praise can vary at an individual level, and determine a range of responses related to performance and affect (Baron, 1988; Brophy, 1981; Kanouse et al., 1981). Some learners simply do not react well to feedback, or fail to

apply it constructively, seeking to bolster their positive self-belief rather than to focus on the achievement of learning goals (Hattie and Timperley, 2007).

The individual's general self-efficacy may also affect their response to feedback. Highly self-efficacious learners react well to early positive feedback, which enables them to cope with subsequent negative feedback, whilst less self-efficacious learners are demotivated by early positive feedback, as they fear that further attempts may be less successful (Swann et al., 1988). Learners with low self-efficacy are also more liable to experience negative emotions when negative feedback is received, and are more likely to attribute their perceived failure to ability rather than effort (Hattie and Timperley, 2007).

6.1.6. Amount and Type of Feedback

Most studies of feedback in music teaching and rehearsing situations can be broadly categorised as examining the amount and type of verbal feedback. Although performance skills and knowledge acquisition are widely acknowledged as being influenced by teacher feedback, there have been no definitive conclusions regarding optimal levels of positive and negative feedback in music settings (Duke and Henninger, 1998). Furthermore, the relationship between the amount of positive verbal feedback and student achievement has not always been found to be particularly significant in music education (Price, 1983; Yarbrough, 1975).

The majority of music education research recommends a high ratio of positive to negative feedback, as an emphasis on negative feedback may lead to discouragement, higher levels of off-task behaviour, and reduced performance quality

(Byo, 1994; Madsen and Duke, 1993; Price, 1983, 1992). This is related to the fact that, when feedback concentrates on achievements and progress, the individual's capabilities are highlighted, whilst personal deficiencies are emphasized by feedback that concentrates on the performer's shortcomings (Bandura, 1993). Some observational studies of music teaching and conducting, however, have demonstrated that students can remain hard-working, motivated, attentive and successful even when receiving high rates of negative feedback relative to positive feedback (Madsen and Alley, 1979; Price and Yarbrough, 1991; Siebenaler, 1997; Yarbrough and Price, 1981, 1989). This is partly explained by the intrinsic rewards of musical performance, as reinforcement is usually derived from the musical activities themselves, to the extent that additional reinforcement from the teacher may be less necessary than in other spheres (Madsen and Alley, 1979; Madsen and Duke, 1985). The nature of instruction in musical performance skills, which inherently involves a constant interaction between teacher/conductor and performer, may also explain the higher rates of negative verbal feedback observed in the aforementioned studies:

Because music performance instruction affords students frequent opportunities to demonstrate their levels of skill acquisition moment-to-moment, it seems logical that the function of teacher verbalizations, particularly negative feedback, may be different than in situations in which there are fewer response opportunities. (Duke and Henninger, 1998: 484)

There is some evidence that providing feedback has a positive effect on the performance of high school choirs, whether or not the feedback itself is positive, relative to no feedback (Dunn, 1997). In music performance, feedback is derived from the student's own perceptions of their accomplishment of the goals determined by the teacher, as well as from teacher feedback, which may compensate for lower levels of explicit encouragement (Duke and Henninger, 1998; Madsen and Alley, 1979; Madsen

and Duke, 1985). Therefore a lack of obvious praise may not always indicate a lack of feedback:

Excellent teachers do, in fact, control the rate and proportion of positive and negative feedback communicated to students by selecting and ordering performance tasks in such a way as to increase the likelihood that students will be successful. (Duke and Henninger, 1998: 484)

The rewards inherent in music making mean that students prefer to spend time on performance rather than non-performance activities, interpreting the latter as 'timeout from reinforcement' (Spradling, 1985; Witt, 1986). This may account for the fact that a high level of teacher talk in music classes and rehearsals can have a negative impact on the participants' learning and general mood, particularly in relation to student attentiveness (Nápoles, 2006; Nápoles and Vázquez-Ramos, 2013; Yarbrough and Price, 1981). However, these adverse effects were observed amongst school and university students where the emphasis was often on academic musical task preparation rather than on preparation for public performance, and therefore may not be generalisable to adult amateur populations.

My findings relating to the role of verbal communication in the choral environment, including factors related to the amount, content and source of feedback, will be presented in the following section, with particular reference to its impact on confidence levels amongst adult amateur singers.

6.2. FINDINGS

6.2.1. Positive Feedback

The feedback you know...It's great when we've done a performance and everybody says 'That was great. That was really good'. [...]
I never thought I'd do *anything* like that! **FG3.D.5**

All three focus groups and all sixteen of the participants in the individual interviews talked at length about the value of verbal feedback from others, and its role in confidence building. The subject of feedback arose at a very early stage in each interview as a spontaneous response to an open question about the benefits derived from performing (see Appendices 9 and 10). Positive feedback was immediately mentioned by several participants as one of the motivations for continuing to perform and, in the case of S4 (Table 6.1), as an impetus for wanting to improve.

Table 6.1. 'That was wonderful!'

| |
|---|
| I've had people come to me afterwards and say 'I thoroughly enjoyed it', and it's <i>good</i> . And that's why you come back and do it again next time. FG3.B.2 |
| That's the big thing. If you feel as though you're being appreciated...People come to you and say 'That was wonderful!' and your chest sticks out a mile! It's wonderful. Lovely sort of feedback, and it's great. That's the sort of thing that does it for me. S11.5 |
| If someone tells you you're good, you probably sing it better next time and...'Cause you want to get that positive...strokes, don't you? S4.18 |

Participants specifically linked positive feedback with the development of their confidence as a singer (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2. 'You can do it'

| |
|---|
| The praise, and that...Somebody actually saying 'You can do it - don't be frightened of it. You actually can do it and you're doing it quite well', that is a good...that gives you so much confidence. FG1.X.15 |
| It's quite nice when you get feedback, just in a group or individually, when somebody says 'That was nice'. That, for me, just boosts my confidence a bit. FG3.N.2 |
| People come back and they say 'Ooh, that was very good', and then that builds your confidence, you know. So then you don't have so much of an issue. S4.17 |
| Actually, when someone says a positive thing about how you sing, you think 'Oh, OK. So it's not just a singing in the shower voice – it's OK!' S10.9 |

When asked about their sources of confidence, two of the participants described their experiences in a way that epitomises the practical application of Bandura's (1977) theory, illustrating the connection between feedback, perceived task mastery and increased self-efficacy (Table 6.3).

Table 6.3. Confidence from positive strokes

| |
|--|
| I felt very unsure when I joined the choir because I hadn't sung really for years and years and years. It just the more you do...feedback from yourself [conductor/researcher] when you say 'hey that sounded really, really good' [...] Once you know you're successful when you do things, even just you (to conductor/researcher) saying that's good, if you succeed at something then it gives you confidence and then you go from strength to strength. FG1.H.18 |
| I just wonder if it's the same as me, if they derive [confidence] from a...pleasure of getting better, and positive strokes that people have given to them. I'm sure that's got to be the key [...] I would have thought, that more often than not, it comes from people giving them positive strokes, and then feeling good about themselves and then building on it. S4.47 |

6.2.2. Amount of Feedback

Some singers expressed regret that feedback was not always as forthcoming as they'd like, or that feedback was often non-committal (Table 6.4), and felt that more information about their performance would be useful.

Table 6.4. ‘You don’t hear either way’

| |
|---|
| The feedback. The confidence comes from somebody actually <i>saying</i> ‘Actually, that was <i>good!</i> ’ And <i>usually</i> people don’t do that [...] You don’t hear <i>either way</i> . S6.57 |
| I think the other thing is feedback, as well. I think it’s good to get people to tell <i>you</i> ...And that doesn’t happen very often, believe it or not. People won’t be honest with you, when you are singing. FG3.Q.8 |
| Choral society feedback? They’ll just say ‘There were some good things in it’. This is what we get from [our conductor] – ‘There were some very good things in there’. So you know it wasn’t very good. S9.25 |

Lack of criticism as well as praise was seen as detrimental to the singer’s sense of self-confidence (Table 6.5), and was cited as a major factor in feelings of insecurity and self-doubt.

Table 6.5. ‘You don’t know where you are’

| |
|---|
| Thinking about a show recently that I did, the [musical director] was very quiet and didn’t say much, and that felt...That didn’t feel right. S16.13 |
| FG2.K: You need criticism as well as praise. Because if you work in a <i>void</i> , where nothing is said, you don’t know <i>where</i> you are. FG2.B: You feel insecure. FG2.E: Yeah. FG2.K: And I’ve had that in my working life, where <i>nothing</i> was ever said, one way or the other, about what you were doing, and so you don’t know if it’s good, bad, or indifferent. And you actually end up as a wreck, because you don’t understand it. FG2.B: You start doubting yourself. FG2.62 |

6.2.3. Reliability and Credibility

I said to my friends afterwards ‘What was the feedback on Carmina Burana?’
But then *their* husbands tend to say ‘Oh, marvellous! Oh, lovely!’
And you think ‘I don’t think it actually was’. **S9.25**

The fact that verbal encouragement is most effective in building self-efficacy if the person giving the encouragement is seen as trustworthy and credible (Bandura, 1977) was clearly demonstrated by the participants in this study. During the first focus group, one of the singers raised the issue of rapport and trust as a factor in whether or

not verbal feedback is effective (Table 6.6). Another participant responded to this with an example of a situation in which an examiner's credibility was damaged, as far as the singer was concerned, which resulted in a lack of trust in his judgment.

Table 6.6. 'What did he know?'

| |
|---|
| I think you've got to have a rapport with that person and I think you've got to trust what they're telling you and be happy with what they're helping you with. FG1.X.15 |
| [The examiner] sat back and said right away, 'Your German accent is impeccable. But you need to go and learn better Italian'. Well, I had done Italian O level and I was mortified. I was absolutely mortified, and I was sure these Italian songs had gone well. Anyway, when he said my German accent was impeccable, I just thought 'You're an idiot!' [...] I just thought 'What did <i>he</i> know?' Because he didn't know I couldn't speak German, so I had absolutely no confidence at all in what he then told me about my performance and the rest of it. FG1.W.15 |

Several singers expressed doubts in the reliability of feedback received from audience members, and wondered if they had simply felt socially obliged to be complimentary. This left the singers wondering whether they were performing well or not, and the ensuing feeling of insecurity was sometimes detrimental to their confidence in their ability or to their perception of the performance. FG3.Q. (Table 6.7) wondered if a lack of comment from audience members might indicate that the performance was not a success, and speculated that people can sometimes be inhibited, possibly by their sense of needing to be polite, about giving honest feedback.

Table 6.7. 'Are they too nice?'

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|--|
| Sometimes if someone says to you 'That sounded good', I think to myself [dejected tone] 'Oh, it wasn't that brilliant', and I think 'Are they just saying that for something to say?' They think they've got to say something so they say that, and you think 'Oh...' [doubtful] you know. FG3.N.10 |
| I wonder whether people that <i>don't</i> think you did a good job probably don't say <i>anything</i> . [General laughter] So when you perform, and nobody comes up to you and says 'That was lovely', you walk away and you think 'Are they telling me that they didn't like it?' I don't know. Are they too nice to say 'That was not good'. FG3.Q.12 |
| Generally speaking, I've spoken to people who've been [to our concerts] and they're always pretty good about it. They might often not like it, but they don't say so! [laughs] S11.23 |

Although feedback from friends and family was valued by some participants, people who were emotionally close to the singers were often seen as potentially unreliable sources of genuine feedback (Table 6.8), as some singers felt that they might naturally tend to be partisan or want to be seen as supportive.

Table 6.8. Clapping ‘even if you’re crap’

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|---|
| I think people – especially people that you know – won’t be honest with you, and say ‘That was crap’. [All laugh] Because people are too nice, aren’t they? And sometimes constructive criticism can help you – actually more so than praise. FG3.Q.12 |
| People are there supporting their families, and they <i>know</i> that people are nervous, and they...And they’ll give you a clap even if you’re crap, right? [Laughs] Because that’s polite, isn’t it? S4.8 |
| [Wife] would say ‘You never think you’re very good, but you <i>are</i> ’. And I say ‘Well, you <i>would</i> say that, wouldn’t you?’ S6.57 |
| People don’t tend to say ‘Actually, you were really rubbish tonight’. [Laughs] They don’t tend to <i>say</i> that! S3.41 |

Other participants, however, had stories to tell about family members who are so painfully honest, or usually so sparing with their compliments, that it can be assumed that their opinions can be trusted (Table 6.9). Despite the ‘grievous’ or ‘brutal’ nature of some of the feedback received from their nearest and dearest, these singers appreciated their honesty, and realised that, in these cases, any compliments or encouraging comments are likely to be genuine.

Table 6.9. 'Brutal honesty'

| |
|---|
| My mother gave us the feedback to kill for! The [choir members] used to say to me, 'Well, what does your mum say?' Because, whereas most people say 'Oh, that was <i>beautiful</i> . I enjoyed myself so much. <i>Thank you</i> ,' my mother would say 'What did you do <i>that</i> for?! Why did you mix that music in that way?' Or 'You didn't look very happy!' [laughs] Or... [gives exaggerated yawn], or whatever it was. Brutally honest! Sometimes it was very grievous! S13.28 |
| [My wife] will <i>say</i> , one way or the other. Now, [she'll] tell us what the male voice choir is like, if [the family] get forced to see it, and they'll tell us what [chamber choir's] like. [The wives] tell us what they like and what they don't like [...] And, if the sopranos are too loud, you generally get to hear about that! [laughs] S6.58 |
| My husband would say, who's sat through quite a lot of performances, and gone 'Oh that was really...not very good.' He doesn't pull his punches. S9.11 |
| I think my wife's my biggest influence in terms of what I should do and what I should go for. There's no pulling punches! If it was crap, it was crap, you know. You know where you stand. Equally, the other way, if it was good, or could be developed... <i>Constructive criticism</i> . FG3.C.64 |
| Recently since joining [choir], my <i>mum</i> [surprised] who's not given to dishing out many compliments...the last concert we did, she said, 'That concert was beautiful. You all looked so confident and enjoying what you are doing', and I thought 'Oh that's good'. So that's given me a lot more confidence. FG1.E.18 |

Some singers felt that, even when audience members are being honest, their opinions may be confusing when they do not coincide with those of the performers (Table 6.10). S3 explained the difference between audience feedback and her own perception of some performances in terms of differing perspectives, whilst S15 attributes this difference of opinion to a lack of musical experience amongst her friends in the audience (see Catano, 1975, 1976).

Table 6.10. Different points of view

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|--|
| Sometimes that does happen, where you, for some reason, don't feel the concert's gone particularly well, and yet often somebody in the audience says 'Actually, it was really good. That's probably the best I've heard you sing'. And I think 'That's really kind of bizarre'. S3.42 |
| Well, the people I know who are in the audience don't sing themselves, so they're all going to say 'Ooh, I enjoyed that'. S15.27 |

6.2.4. Feedback from Other Singers

In accordance with the reported significance of peer support, encouragement and validation (see Chapter 5), specific verbal feedback from fellow singers was particularly valued by participants. This was often seen as reliable and honest, especially when expressed spontaneously.

Table 6.11. Knowing they mean it

| |
|---|
| I think most of the members of the group are honest, and they'll say 'Ooh, that wasn't so good', or 'We sounded great on that!' S12.20 |
| This was something I always found at [amateur operatic society] rehearsals, where you finally performed a solo, and you knew you'd nailed it, and spontaneously everybody'd turn round and say 'Well done!' And you knew that they meant it. And that has always meant quite a lot. FG3.B.11 |

The majority of singers reported positive experiences specifically relating to verbal feedback received from their peers (Table 6.12), and this was often connected to the level of rapport, closeness and teamwork within the group (also see Chapter 5).

Table 6.12. Making you feel positive

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| There are people in the choir, when I've done a solo, who've come up and said things, and said good, constructive stuff, like [baritone] did after last year. He said ' <i>Really good</i> '. And [tenor] did the year before. I think most people in the close group that you're doing things with are supportive. S5.44 |
| You do get feedback in rehearsals, definitely, from your colleagues [...] 'cause you get a little clap sometimes or ' <i>Mmmm! That was nice</i> '. So, you know, the sopranos and the altos are listening, so that's nice. And we do the same...that's nice. So you do get feedback there. <i>Rarely</i> as an individual, unless you're on your own singing, and people recognise it's a bit traumatic. S4.26 |
| I think they can make you feel <i>positive</i> . There's never been a negative for me...In the main, no. We are quite positive. So if someone does a really good job, then we'll say they've done a really good job. S10.12 |

Occasionally, singers reported feeling intimidated by the presence of other experienced performers (Table 6.13), and experiencing an increased sense of pressure due to this (S4) or being irritated by interference and undue criticism from other members of the ensemble (S8).

Table 6.13. ‘Who are you to tell me?’

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|---|
| What made that difficult was everybody else in the room were singers. So everybody’s gonna look at you and <i>judge</i> you, and form an opinion [...] Standing there, in [rehearsal venue], with a group of people who are all accomplished singers, you know, some of them very good, made it doubly nervous, I think. S4.8 |
| Sometimes I can just pass it off and ignore it, but I <i>have</i> had occasions when I think, you know ‘Well, who are you to tell <i>me</i> . If [conductor] tells me, I’m fine, but who are <i>you</i> to tell me that I’ve got it wrong? And yes, I <i>know</i> that I have’. But if you get it too often, and they’re not picking up anything <i>they’re</i> doing wrong, I do start to get a bit prickly then. S8.31 |

Even in situations where feedback from fellow choir members was not entirely positive, the majority of participants felt that sharing their feelings about performances, and their progress in rehearsals, was generally useful. S6 (Table 6.14) provides a vignette of some of the good-natured banter that sometimes takes place between the singers.

Table 6.14. Sharing the moment

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|--|
| [Fellow choir member] and I sometimes give each other feedback, but looking for ‘Is there anything I could do better?’ and ‘What do you reckon? Is there anything?’ Well, I’ll just try that’. ‘OK. Yeah’. Usually, with a bit of tongue in cheek, people will say ‘Well, that was crap, wasn’t it?’ You know, you get <i>that!</i> [laughs] And you think ‘Well, yeah’. You <i>know</i> it usually. <i>Usually</i> it’s ‘cause you <i>know</i> it was crap! But no, sometimes when we do things, and they’ll say ‘The tenors were good at that’, and the sopranos will say ‘Gosh, you were good at that!’ And it’s quite nice to hear that sometimes. And the basses, I think when the basses get it right [...] it’s nice to hear them get praise, because they’re always getting a little bit of a beating! [laughs] S6.60 |
|--|

S1 and S2 (Table 6.15) elaborate on the constructive criticism that some of the singers share amongst themselves, and comment on the positive effect that this can have.

Table 6.15. ‘We always have something to say about it!’

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|--|
| When you sit down, and we’ve sung a piece, there’s two or three of us, and [first alto] and I, and [second alto] is usually with us...who else is with us...but certainly [first alto] and I will sometimes say ‘Ooh, we didn’t do too well with that’, or ‘I forgot to come in’, or ‘I didn’t come in on time’, or ‘We were a bit loud’. [...] We tend to chat about it when we sit down...very quietly! S1.51 |
| I’m very self-critical! [laughs] It can take place in here [taps head] and sometimes just discuss it with...like in choir sometimes...with [first soprano] or [second soprano]....I’ll just sort of say ‘Perhaps we ought to sing a bit quieter’, or maybe ‘We weren’t quite right there, were we?’ ‘No, we weren’t!’ [laughs] And so we can sort of discuss it amongst ourselves. S2.35 |
| With the choral society, there’s about eight of us who go off to the pub after, and we always have <i>something</i> to say about it! [laughs] S15.26 |

On the whole, feedback from other members of the ensemble was reported as being beneficial (Table 6.16) in terms of reinforcing singers’ confidence in their own judgments of their performance (S5), and in validating their identity as a singer (FG3).

Table 6.16. Reinforcement and recognition

| |
|---|
| When we’ve done a performance like last night, I’m happy because we sounded good together. So when other people were saying ‘Yeah, we were good,’ it just reinforces your own confidence that it was a good performance. S5.50 |
| FG3.N: A number of times when we’ve been doing [amateur operatic society show] , and someone’s done a solo in one of the rehearsals, and everyone will just start and applaud, and that’s fantastic. |
| FG3.B: That means so much, when that happens. FG3.11 |

6.2.5. Source of feedback

I quite enjoy that feedback... from peers. Not only from peers, but from people like yourself [to researcher] – people that *know* music. **FG3.Q.8**

The focus group discussions relating to verbal feedback were followed up, during the individual interviews, by a specific question on the relative value of feedback from various sources: ***Are there any particular people whose feedback you value more than others?*** (see Question 27, Appendix 10). In response to this question, several

singers emphatically stated that the opinion of their choral peers was respected and valued above that of audience members or other listeners (Table 6.17).

Table 6.17. People who ‘know what they’re talking about’

A couple of the best comments, or things that have meant most to me, have been when I’ve done solos [...] and some of the people from the choir have come up and said ‘That was really good’, because they’re people who I sort of appreciate and value their opinions, because you know just the way they *do* things, that they don’t throw away comments or whatever. And therefore *that* feedback sometimes is a lot better.

FG3.D.12

Appraisal from the people who I *know* know what they’re talking about, be it a teacher or a fellow singer, but as long as I know they know what they’re talking about. **S16.37.**

S3 and S4 described their own ‘pecking order’ of people whose opinions they value (Table 6.18). This reflects the differential value of feedback, according to the status of its source (Bandura, 1977; Catano, 1976).

Table 6.18. A pecking order of praise

I think if you respect somebody’s musical ability or their ear for music, and what they’re trying to do, I think you are gonna, you know, really be *pleased* if you do well and they actually do praise you. It means more than if just some person in the street said ‘Ooh, I saw your Christmas concert and it was really good’. Yes, you do think ‘Ooh, that’s really nice’, but I think it means more when it comes from somebody that knows something about it. **S3.39**

I would value a fellow singer’s opinion more than just somebody particularly in the audience that...If you’re in a pub and someone says ‘Oh, that was nice, mate’, that’s level one, ‘cause that’s a guy who probably doesn’t sing himself or whatever. If you’re in a concert and people are there to listen to you, and then they come up and say to you ‘That was very good’, that’s the next level up. And then I think the best level you get is when a fellow singer, or someone you know is a singer, in the audience, comes and says something to you. And I think that’s a better...that’s the best, I think. **S4.52**

In all three focus groups and in all of the individual interviews, it was made clear that feedback was particularly valued when it came from people whose musical opinion is respected, including fellow singers (see Tables 6.14-6.19).

6.2.6. Conductor Feedback

Although peer feedback was highly prized by many participants, the majority of interviewees described the conductor as one of the most influential sources of feedback (see Tables 6.19-6.24), due to his formal role as a musical expert.

Table 6.19. 'People in the know'

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|--|
| I suppose, really, if people like [alto] and you [researcher/conductor], people that know music, that perform, say it's good, that's fine. It's nice for an audience member to do it as well, but if you get it from a professional, that's even more, that's even better. S8.20 |
| Researcher: Are there any people whose feedback you value more than others? S15: Well, another singer, I suppose. Or a conductor. S15.26 |
| Well, sometimes it's your peers really, as well as people in the know - people like yourself [to researcher/conductor] [...] If you do something and it sounds good, you know, if they come up and say 'That sounded really good. I liked the way you did so-and-so and so-and-so', it's sort of like a general discussion about it afterwards. S2.34 |

S3 (Table 6.20) suggested that it is not always necessary to like the person providing feedback, if their opinion is respected. Perceiving her conductor as musically knowledgeable meant that she saw him as a credible expert, and consequently trusted his opinion above that of an appreciative but non-expert audience member. S10 echoed this, comparing the perceived trustworthiness of her musical director's feedback with that of her mother, suspecting the latter of partisanship. This, however, places a great responsibility on the conductor, as this level of influence upon singers means that both negative and positive feedback are taken very seriously, and conductors can therefore contribute to undermining confidence as well as building it.

Table 6.20. Respect

I think it's people that I respect, in terms of their knowledge of music, or their ear for music, or whatever. And...even somebody that has been quite harsh and actually quite critical, and very difficult to get on with, like the Musical Director at [choir] who's now retired - he was incredibly nasty and sometimes really undermined your confidence. But equally, when he did praise you, or whatever, I actually really *liked* his praise, because I respected him. So, as harsh as he was, and sometimes as much as I hated him, I actually did respect his ear for music and what he was doing. **S3.39**

My mum's always said I could sing, but she's my mum! [laughs] So you take that with a little pinch of salt. But feedback from the Musical Director saying 'We need to get you singing some solos and stuff' is worth it's weight in gold to me. 'Cause I respect her, and she's giving that feedback, so I think 'OK, I'll give it a go!' **S10.18**

The significance of conductor feedback can be magnified in the case of some older adult singers who are quite alone in their everyday lives, possibly due to divorce or bereavement, and who therefore have no significant others to provide support and encouragement for their performing activities (Table 6.21).

Table 6.21. Significance of conductor feedback

Researcher: Do you have anybody who's supportive to your singing, or who might give you some feedback after the performance generally?

S15: No, not really. Apart from what we get from the conductor afterwards **S15.6**

Praise from the conductor was particularly valued by the majority of participants, as singers often seem to have a strong desire to please the leader of the group by performing well, alongside a fear of letting him or her down [Table 6.22).

Table 6.22. Sense of responsibility to conductor

I felt bad for you [to researcher/conductor] because I wasn't giving you a hundred per cent, and really I didn't enjoy it. I thought 'That's not fair!' – on you, not on me!' **S1.3**

When asked if there are any things that a conductor might do or say that might affect her confidence, S1 remarked upon the positive effect that conductor feedback can have (6.23).

Table 6.23. 'You tell us'

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| In a good way - If they're positive and...which is what you [to researcher/conductor] do when we sound good, you tell us. S1.35 |
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Some participants specifically cited praise from conductors among the motivational factors for continuing as a choral singer (Table 6.24), demonstrating the power that choral leaders can wield when commenting upon performances.

Table 6.24. 'I must keep this up'

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| The conductor at the time said 'You're one of my best sopranos,' which was a real boost, you know. And I thought 'Wow! That's wonderful!' And then I thought 'Well, I must keep this up'. S14.9 |
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| 'This guy used to say 'You've got a sweet little voice', he always used to pick it out as, you know [...] but I thought 'OK, I've got quite a pretty little voice'. I think those were the words he used. So that made me think that there was something there. S7.29 |
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6.2.7. Style and Delivery of Feedback

The authority inherent in conductor feedback can also have the opposite effect to the motivational influence shown above (Table 6.24), especially if individuals are singled out for public criticism (Table 6.25). Several participants described situations in which a singer had been deterred from continuing in a choir due to being 'named and shamed' in front of everyone.

Table 6.25. Getting it wrong

Where people I thought got it wrong was [musical director] once picked out a guy...We were doing some [Gilbert and Sullivan], and he said 'I can hear somebody not quite right', and he homed in on it, like *homed* in on it. And he didn't quite go 'And it's *you!*' But it was like that. And this guy was destroyed by it. He never came back. He left after that rehearsal because he felt he'd been singled out. **S6.32**

We did some particularly technically difficult work, and [soprano] repeatedly made some mistake in the diction, in a particular place, and the conductor got off the stage, walked straight across to my friend, stood in front of her and said [bangs table violently] 'No! That's such and such!' And my friend said 'Oh, I felt so awful. In front of everybody'. And lost her confidence. And she's since left. And I'm really sad about it. She had a nice voice, with quite a bit of depth to it, you know. And that was a failing of the conductor. She should have waited until afterwards, and sidled up and said 'Hello. How are you? By the way, that is...If you could just try and remember that'. Just try something gentle, you know. Gently, finding the time. But not in front of everyone. **S14.39**

This theme was also raised by singers who had personal experience of this demotivating approach to delivering criticism, and several related leaving particular choirs after this had happened (Table 6.26). Although they sought out other opportunities to sing, and later continued with their choral activities, they gave the impression that being singled out had had a serious effect upon their confidence.

Table 6.26. 'Dressing down' and 'picking out'

FG1.X: A musical director dressed me down in front of [everyone] and [...] I was never going to sing again. It really knocked my confidence and I thought, 'If that's what they think of me I don't want to come anymore'.

FG.1.N: 'I must be rubbish'...You get that feeling, 'I must be rubbish'. **FG1.22**

I was with [choir] for about 4 years, an absolutely fantastic choir, but the pressure was so enormous. She'd got to win everything; everything had got to be perfect and she would point out, she would stick her finger – fortunately I was never on the front – she would pick people out and criticise and the pressure got so great I thought I'd burst. She had a go at one of my friends and she said, 'I don't like this'. And I said, 'No, I don't like this'. So we both made a joint decision that we wouldn't go anymore and it was such a relief. **FG1.K.23**

The second focus group continued this theme in depth (Table 6.27), with two of the singers sharing some of the devastating effects, in their own previous experience of different choirs, of being singled out for personal criticism.

Table 6.27. 'Picking on people she didn't like'

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| <p>FG2.K: One week [conductor] made me and one other girl stand out and sing one of the verses just as a duet. A choir of 60 people and me and one other had to sing the nightmare song that nobody could get right, she made two of us sing one of the verses on our own.</p> <p>FG2.B: I think it was out of spite actually. [Laughter]</p> <p>FG2.K: How to destroy somebody's confidence is to give them a piece that they can't sing and make them sing it in front of a choir of 60 people [...] She had a very good way of <i>picking</i> on people she didn't like.</p> <p>FG2.B: Oh, she would do it in a very snide, horrible way.FG2.62</p> |
| <p>FG2.K.65: I think your name was the first one I learnt in [choir], because she was always saying 'B, you've got it wrong!</p> <p>FG2.B: She always would. If anything went wrong, it was always <i>my</i> fault. And then I really began thinking I was a really awful singer, and that I couldn't hear if I was wrong, because I went home and listened to my recordings and it sounded right to me, and yet I was always told I was wrong! And then one day, someone next to me said, when she was saying it again, 'But you were not even singing that part!' And suddenly the penny dropped, that I was just, you know...It was a personal thing.</p> <p>FG2.K: It was a personal thing. And if you feel you're being victimised, like that...</p> <p>FG2.B: And I really got so insecure that I <i>really</i> thought...And I kept on listening to these...I recorded everything I was doing, and I listened to it, and I thought 'To <i>me</i>, it sounds right'. And then I thought, 'Oh, maybe I haven't got any sense of music. Maybe I can't hear if it's wrong!' And I began to doubt my own ability. FG2.65</p> |

Table 6.27 contains dramatic descriptions of bullying, harassment, and victimisation, to the extent that the singers' sense of their own musicality was completely undermined. Some of these revelations appear quite shocking but, unfortunately, do not seem to be particularly rare. S16, who assessed himself as a relatively confident singer, summarised the effects that singling out individuals can have (Table 6.28), and suggested that the conductor should find other ways of handling problems and giving feedback.

Table 6.28. Confidence and comfort

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| <p>I think if the Musical Director is welcoming and encouraging, and not scathing or picking out individuals, that makes a huge difference. You feel confident then. If it's an MD that picks out individuals – even if it's just to say 'Right. The tenors do this line'. And then one person at a time does that line, I feel that's picking on people. I'm not comfortable with that [...] To some extent, I think a good MD, if they've got just the tenors or the basses or the sopranos or whatever group, they should be able to hear the individual that's not quite getting it right, and find a way round of solving that problem without picking out any individual at all. S16.30</p> |
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As well as finding that individual public criticism adversely affected choral singers' confidence, many participants reported that making an example of a particular section of the ensemble can have similarly destructive effects (Table 6.29).

Table 6.29. 'The weakest link'

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| I think, sometimes conductors can really undermine the confidence, not just of individuals, but of certain groups - so the soprano group or, you know, whoever is the weakest link. They can really undermine their confidence, and that just makes the group underperform even more. So I think it's got to be done in the right way. S3.32 |
| The only way that my confidence is knocked is when you're victimised by a conductor...There's only one conductor, in my little life, who's tended to victimise the basses. It's only 'cause he sings bass, so he knows, you see. He doesn't know anything else! [laughs] S13.17 |

S8 (Table 6.30) gave several instances of different conductors undermining the confidence of sections and individuals in this way, and described the process in some detail.

Table 6.30. 'If you didn't get it right, it hurt'

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| Giving an example from [choir] down in [county], is belittling people, showing people up. I mean, [conductor] used to do it all the time. If not individuals, it was certainly sections. [He] would show up sections. And I think that's not helpful [...] This guy used to really be quite nasty. And he used to lose his rag when, say, the basses or the baritones didn't get it right [...] He would do it line by line. In fact, sometimes he would do it even half a line. So 'These three do it. You three do it'. [...] His predecessor – he used to do the same [...]. It <i>hurt</i> , you know. If you didn't get it right, it hurt [...] If you didn't get it right, he would belittle you [...] People used to think 'Oh shit', and they used to be afraid then, to actually sing out, because they were afraid to get it wrong. S8.58 |
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The singers describing these experiences (Tables 6.25-6.30) use very strong words, such as 'victimised', 'belittling', 'hurt', 'undermined', 'afraid' and even 'destroyed', which leave us in no doubt about the damage to confidence that can result from this style of delivering feedback, and which clearly falls within the definition of destructive criticism (Baron, 1988).

6.2.8. Constructive Criticism

Destructive criticism, especially when directed at individuals or sections of the choir, was reported as having an adverse effect upon performance and efficacy. Constructive criticism, however, when justified, delivered in a positive manner and counter-balanced with praise, was not only well-received but expected by the majority of participants (Table 6.31).

Table 6.31. Taking criticism

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| I can take criticism, that's not a problem. If the altos are singing wrong [...] or we've missed bits or whatever, fine, you know, I can cope with that. That's not an issue at all. That wouldn't make me suddenly shrink on the spot and think 'Oh my God!' So that aspect doesn't...It's more...it's praise, or 'OK, well, you haven't quite got that. Let's try it again', and 'Let's go over it until you get it right'. And the way each part is taken apart, and then brought together, maybe with another part. S1.36 |
| I'm not offended by negatives. If they say 'That's not right, we'll have to do it again', that doesn't bother me. Fine. He's right...well, not every time! But you know what I mean. At least if it's constructive criticism, then that's fine. S11.35 |
| If they just stood there and listened and criticised, and you didn't get any positive feedback, then that would knock your confidence a bit. When criticism's constructive you don't mind. And the sort of things that [conductor] said <i>were</i> constructive criticism [...]. It was a very slow song and it needed to be smooth, and we were [chopping action] hopping along. And she said 'Oh, it needs to be <i>smoother</i> than that. Let it flow'. That sort of thing you don't mind. Because when you do it again, you do it like that and she goes 'Great!' S12.23 |

Several singers gave examples of the content and delivery of constructive criticism, which they found helpful (Table 6.32).

Table 6.32. 'A pleasant conversation'

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| Someone who will not be too ready to challenge you if you don't sing right. Or do it in such a way that it's a pleasant conversation. If they've got to take you to one side, they do it on one side, but they do it in a positive manner. S4.48 |
| If a section's doing really well to say 'I like it. I want it just like that'. Or if somebody's too loud, to quieten them down. To make contact in a <i>nice</i> way, so that people's feelings aren't hurt, because people are very, <i>very</i> touchy, and they can take offence when you may not realise you've given it. Then there's mutterings, you know. S14.41 |
| Our conductor is a very gentle, good rehearser. He doesn't coerce anybody. He's a non-coercer. 'Very good, but...' is the line, you know [laughs], rather than 'You were singing flat!' S13.32 |

S4 and S13 (Table 6.33) were very expressive when elaborating on their experiences and expectations of effective conductor feedback.

Table 6.33. A ‘comfortable style’

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| [Not] someone who would scorn, and would be...critical in a non-positive manner, saying ‘Well, that was a bit rubbish’, or ‘You’re not trying hard enough’, [...] You could say the same thing in a different way, you know. ‘Perhaps you’re tired tonight, everybody. Perhaps we just need to lift it a little bit. That was good but I’m sure you can do better’. Whereas, someone could say ‘Look, that was rubbish. You’ve done better before. Concentrate everybody and bloody sing!’ S4.48 |
| Now, [former conductor], his style, I <i>love</i> . He’s just sort of beatifically ‘You’re going to sing well’, and you <i>do</i> ! And then [chamber choir conductor] has this very comfortable style of conducting. But it’s all to do with taking the choir into your confidence. Assuming that, as a conductor, they’re going to sing well anyway. ‘Now we can do it a little bit better if we do it this way’. S13.31 |

Constructive criticism from the conductor was generally seen as acceptable and helpful, as long as it is fair and is perceived as reflecting the efforts that the choir are making.

Table 6.34. Justified criticism

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| I think if they do, not criticise, but point out if we’re not following the line, if it’s right, then it doesn’t really worry me, ‘cause I like to get it right [...] If you feel it’s unjust, then it rattles you a bit, but you move on. As long as it’s justified, I think. S6.30 |
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6.2.9. Balancing Criticism and Praise

Praise was seen as one of the most important elements of conductor feedback, as a motivator to achieve, as a counterweight to criticism, and as a powerful tool in building confidence (Table 6.35).

Table 6.35. Praise and elation

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| I think a lot of praise, you know. A lot of ‘Yeah, that’s brilliant! You got that right.’ ‘Cause then when [conductor] says that we didn’t get <i>that</i> right, it doesn’t feel all negative. So I think it’s helpful to give you a lot of praise for the good bits. And also ‘cause it helps you to aspire to the good bits. If you think ‘Yeah, actually that went well’. S7.33 |
| Well, obviously, you’ve got to be encouraging [laughs]. [...] and [conductor] will say ‘That was really good, guys’. And you probably know it was anyway, but it’s nice to have that confirmation. S15.22 |
| I think that’s one thing about [conductor] – he’s the first one to praise us. Last night we sang ‘Eriskay Love Lilt’, unaccompanied, which is unusual for us [...] We got to the last note and [conductor] went ‘That was right on key’. And I went ‘Ah!’ [triumphant gesture]. And I think everybody felt quite elated by that. S11.36 |

Although praise was seen as an important part of encouraging the singers, it was felt by some participants that a healthy balance between praise and criticism needs to be attained. Focus Group 2 (Table 6.36) had a lengthy discussion about the development of a lack of trust in a previous conductor. This arose due to a perceived lack of criticism and a surfeit of over-effusive praise, which led to questions about the genuineness of the feedback and the conductor’s judgement, and had an adverse effect upon confidence.

Table 6.36. ‘Not enough criticism’

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| FG2.B: Actually I find, you know...In [community choir], it was a bit anything goes, more or less, you know. There wasn’t...I didn’t feel that [conductor] was being strict enough with us. |
| FG2.K: Not enough criticism. |
| FG2.B: Not enough criticism. And that made me feel uncertain of whether or not I did things right, because I felt I couldn’t believe...I couldn’t rely on her to say if I did things wrong. Whereas in [choir], she’s very strict [...] She wouldn’t sort of point people out, but she would make sure that the part was rehearsed until everything was right. So I actually find that is like a security...It’s like a crutch for me, because I know if she doesn’t say anything it means I’ve got it right. Whereas I never felt <i>sure</i> in [choir], and she was very good at making you feel really insecure about...I mean, I had my confidence almost eroded. |
| FG2.K: At one point she really knocked it out of us. |
| FG2.B: She absolutely knocked it out. FG2.62 |

A sense of reality was therefore seen as necessary for the singers to believe that praise is genuine (Table 6.37). Lack of constructive criticism and general over-effusive praise were often reported as factors which made it difficult to trust the judgement or the honesty of the conductor, and this sometimes made the singers doubt the quality of their performance.

Table 6.37. 'The best concert ever'

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| If you're working with somebody that continually says 'That's good. That's good. That's good', you find yourself thinking 'Is it?' S16.37 |
| <p>FG2.K: [Conductor] could be very fulsome in her praise after a concert.</p> <p>FG2.B: Oh, it was always the best concert ever, so...you never knew...</p> <p>FG2.K: ...if there was any truth in it. There was a sort of element that, unless there is some relation to the truth, you know [...] There has to be some criticism along with the praise.</p> <p>FG2.B: Some reality.</p> <p>FG2.K: So you know that it's real, that you're not living in cloud cuckoo land about whether you can do it or not. And we don't want to go out and make a racket. We want people to enjoy what we're doing. And we want to do it <i>right</i>.</p> <p>FG2.B: Yeah...Sometimes you can hear for yourself if something is wrong, can't you? And you don't want to get away with it [...] You need some honesty. FG2.63</p> |

Although realistic feedback was valued, in order to improve performance, hypercritical approaches were seen as having a disheartening effect on the singers. Some conductors were suspected of needless fault-finding, which sometimes adversely affected the singers' impression of the integrity or validity of the feedback (Table 6.38).

Table 6.38. 'Nit-picking'

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| I suppose perhaps when we've had <i>over-criticism</i> , maybe. Or a little bit of nit-picking. [Conductor] can be a little bit nit-picky. And I think, in a way, I get the impression that when he'll say something probably about the dynamic in a particular piece, or he didn't like them notes there, I think to myself [thoughtfully] 'Mmmm. Is that all you've got to say? Can't you think of anything else?' Maybe it's just for the sake of having <i>something</i> to say! S11.36 |
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A straightforward, honest approach from the conductor was generally seen as important for the progress of the choir, and for the development of trust between the singers and the conductor. Furthermore, in an implicit extension of the principles of

specific praise proposed by Kanouse et al., (1981), some participants felt that a lack of specificity in both praise and criticism was likely to undermine the credibility of the conductor, and reduce the effectiveness of the feedback received (Table 6.39).

Table 6.39. ‘That’s nice’

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| I think it’s to be honest – to be honest with the section [...] So, if something isn’t right, then say it, which is, again, what <i>you</i> do [to researcher/conductor]. It’s to say ‘Basses, that didn’t sound right. Tenors, that timing is wrong, completely wrong’. And you go through it. S8.56 |
| I find constant praise irritating. When things are not good, and the conductor says ‘Oh, that was very good’. Rubbish! No, be honest. Be honest, and say ‘Well, look, I’m not happy with such and such. We have to get this right’. And, even if some parts need more rehearsal than others, OK, so as to get the finished product together. S14.31-32 |
| You don’t get the constructive criticism. No. There comes a point where I think he feels he’s flogging a dead horse. Very occasionally he’ll drop a piece ‘cause it really is a non-starter. But other times we’ll just go with it. And you know [fellow singer] and I are always chatting, and [he’ll] say ‘That was <i>crap!</i> ’ And I’ll say ‘It <i>was</i> crap!’ [laughs] And [conductor] will say ‘That’s all right. That’s nice’. S6.37 |

Honesty was seen as being facilitated by the conductor’s level of rapport with the choir (S8, Table 6.40). S8 recognised the art of finding an effective balance when giving honest feedback, constructive criticism and praise and encouragement. He also made it clear that criticism is accepted when trust can be derived from the conductor’s skills, and that a sense of rapport is also helpful. Implicit in S8’s comments is the recognition of the importance, for adult amateur choirs, of balancing the singers’ social needs with attaining task mastery, in terms of individual and collective musical attainment.

Table 6.40. ‘A nice balance’

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| In regards to the choir now, I’m going to be straight. Your [to researcher/conductor] technical abilities are second to none – and I mean that – as well as your rapport, especially with me, you know. The thing is, if you don’t like something, you’ll say it [...] There has to be a certain amount of enjoyment but, I’m sorry, but I <i>am</i> there to learn that music as best as we can learn it, and sing it the best we can. Then, when we’ve done it properly, <i>then</i> we’ll pat ourselves on the back and socialise. And I think we do that with yourself, ‘cause you’ve got a nice balance between the two. S8.55 |
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S9 (Table 6.41) proffered her own recipe for an effective balance of praise and criticism, with recommendations for clarity and a respectful approach.

Table 6.41. A winning formula

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| Well, I think one word of encouragement, and two words of explanation that we can understand, and six criticisms is a formula! [laughs] I think just <i>one</i> bit of praise will cover quite a lot of other stuff, but don't just keep [impersonates conductor growling and cracking the whip]. And, not be patronising, but be clear with your explanation [...] Yeah. Just be a bit more human. But praise of <i>any</i> sort is what everybody thrives on, you know – even the dog! [laughs] S9.53 |
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6.2.10. Mutual Respect and Rapport

[Conductor] wouldn't leave it go until she got it right, but she was nice with it. Her patience, her tolerance, was unbelievable. **S8.59**

S5 (Table 6.42) remembered being very sensitive to comments from the conductor when he first started singing in a choir, after a long break from performing. He attributed his increased capacity to deal with feedback to the rapport that he has developed with his current conductor, and to the realisation that the conductor will give honest feedback when it is necessary. He also acknowledged that his ability to cope with criticism varies according to his physical and psychological state, and that he appreciates the occasions when the conductor recognises this and responds accordingly. By implication, becoming accustomed to the musical director's *modus operandi* can be helpful to singers in accepting and interpreting feedback. Likewise, getting to know the singers and interpreting their moods and receptivity can help conductors to balance their criticism and praise appropriately.

Table 6.42. Getting it right

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| <p>Researcher: What sort of comments might knock your confidence in a rehearsal?</p> <p>S5: In the early days, <i>anything!</i> [laughs] Just the fact that you [researcher/conductor] decided you had to have a word with me, suggests I'm not doing it right. And therefore 'Oh shit! I knew I couldn't cope with this'. Whereas now I think I'd be reasonably balanced. I don't think it would knock my confidence. And I think that's just 'cause of the relationship that you and I have [...] Because you're my teacher and my mentor, or whatever, in a musical sense, then I've got a relationship where I don't worry about...You wouldn't say something unless it needed saying [...] Some nights I'm absolutely knick-knacked, and it's very hard to get...But, in general you seem to sense that, and therefore you don't criticise me when I'm clearly not in a fit state to be singing, and probably shouldn't have bothered coming! [laughs] And I just want to get down the pub and have a couple of pints, you know! S5.49-50</p> |
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S9 (Table 6.43) explicitly stated that finding an appropriate balance of praise and feedback, in order to contribute to positive affect amongst the singers, is of particular importance when dealing with amateur singers, who are participating as part of their leisure. FG3.Q., S7 and S9 were also amongst those who made the point that, as adult 'volunteers', amateur singers do not expect musical goals to be attained at the expense of respect for the participants (Table 6.43).

Table 6.43. 'It's a hobby'

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| <p>I <i>do</i> like it when [conductors] say something positive. It may be rubbish, but there must be something positive about it. And I think you need to have...given that it's a pleasure, it's a hobby, it's in your free time [...]. And, yes, criticise. Yes, be constructive with your criticism. That's absolutely fine. But please find something nice to say. We want to come out of it on a high. S9.51</p> |
| <p>[Conductor] does tend to shout and stomp and stamp and have little paddies a bit more. I mean, he can also be very positive and quite humorous but, I don't know...You sort of end feeling...bearing mind the people that we have as conductors are all teachers, you sometimes think 'Hang on a minute. I'm a grown up. I don't need to be talked to like this'. So you don't need anyone who...well it comes back to respect actually. S7.34</p> |
| <p>Even though [conductor] was good at what he did, and the choir was probably the best it had ever been, there was this animosity against him, because he was such a condescending, patronising bloke, you know what I mean? And so therefore there's a balance between, certainly knowing your music, but treating people with the respect that they deserve. 'Cause we're all volunteers, at the end of the day. FG3.Q.52</p> |

There was widespread agreement (Tables 6.28-6.43) that a respectful style of delivery of feedback, phrased and delivered appropriately for adult participants, combined with a realistic balance of praise and criticism, can contribute to a positive rehearsal environment. Several participants stressed the importance of good humour and a relaxed atmosphere (Table 6.44).

Table 6.44. Feeling ‘comfortable’

When I first started I thought, ‘If they get cross or if everything’s a bit serious, I’m not gonna like this. But the first time you [to researcher/conductor] went into your fits of giggles I thought, ‘No, we’ll be all right’. [Laughter] Because, OK it’s all gone wrong, so what. Let’s have a giggle and then we’ll try again. Then I thought ‘OK, it’s going to be fine’, ‘cause I can’t take too much seriousness, it’s not good for me. **FG1.B.21**

We have a bit of a laugh, and you close it down if it gets too bad. And *you* [researcher/conductor] have a laugh as well with us. With [soprano] and all, when something goes wrong...there’s normally a bit of banter goes across the sections, that we enjoy. ‘Cause you have to. But then, when the learning needs to be done, we get down to the nitty gritty of it. **S8.60**

We’ve had two [conductors] with [choral society] who’ve been very sort of gentle people, and quite humorous. I don’t know...I think it’s important they make you feel comfortable. I mean, [the singers] don’t *have* to be there. So they can’t conduct a choir if there isn’t a choir to conduct. **S7.33**

Several participants specifically echoed the opinion of FG3.Q. (Table 6.43) and felt that there should be an attitude of mutual respect between choir members and conductors, in order to develop confidence within the choir (Table 6.45).

Table 6.45. Mutual respect v. being the ‘maestro’

I think it’s got to be mutual respect. And I think sometimes you get conductors who just have a hint of being a bit too much of ‘the maestro’ [indicates speech marks]. You know, come on, it’s just a small choir in [town]! And you need to feel as though you’re an important part of the set-up, really. So I would look for someone who does respect you, and can still command respect himself. **S7.34**

6.2.11. Attitudes and Approaches

You don't want to be treated like a child, with somebody saying 'You come and stand here at the front and do it all on your own, because you're doing it wrong'. That's bad criticism. **FG2.K.63**

Respect between the singers and the conductor can be eroded, along with confidence levels, if the conductor's approach towards the choir is not appropriate to the age and ability of the members. Many singers described situations in which they had been treated like children by their conductors (Table 6.46), especially by those who are teachers in their 'day jobs' (also see Table 6.43).

Table 6.46. Patronizing and petulant

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| The reason [conductor] was a prat was because he was a teacher, and he had seventy men which he treated like boys [...] He was well respected for his musical ability, but he wasn't respected for the way he treated people. And, quite honestly, that upset a lot of people. S8.53 |
| And, not be patronising, but be clear with your explanation. And getting radgy [irritable], you know [impersonates conductor muttering under his breath] and then standing there, with that supercilious 'I'm waiting for you to stop chattering'. Giving you a little chance to have a little break as well [...] and not deliver that in a patronising way as well, you know – [mimics pompous conductor] 'I've got some notices here and you just have a bit of a chat – OK, that'll do'. [claps hands authoritatively] S9.53 |
| [Conductor] used to get a bit petulant with us, and treat us sometimes like he would the children, I think. And because we're adults, and most of us ladies were older than him [laughs], we took umbrage really. S15.4 |

S13 (Table 6.47) summarised the difference between conductors who treat their adult choir members like children, and those who take a more facilitative, egalitarian and respectful approach.

Table 6.47. 'I'm alright and you're alright'

| |
|---|
| Other [conductors] sometimes [assumes schoolmasterly tone] 'Now we're going to have to bash through this to get this one right!' [Groans]. So it needs to be the positive, musical approach. And not the blamey approach. It's the approach that says 'I'm alright and you're alright'. Not 'I'm alright but you lot are not. I've got to work on you!' S13.31 |
|---|

Some unhelpful attitudes towards adult singers were described, along with a failure to adopt a suitable teaching style and deliver feedback appropriately (Table 6.48). The ‘schoolmasterly’ approach was reported as occasionally extending into dictatorial behaviour, with very negative results as far as mutual collaboration, respect, co-operation and collective confidence were concerned.

Table 6.48. ‘Histrionics’ and ‘hissy fits’

| |
|--|
| Petulance! [laughs] Having a hissy fit. It doesn’t work. It just doesn’t work with older people. S15.24 |
| He used to bang the table and say ‘This is not...’ you know – especially if we were leading up to a competition, then he used to go ape-shit. S8.58 |
| [Conductor] does <i>throw</i> himself around and stamp a lot. I mean, in time with the music, but really...there’s a lot of histrionics. And I think it makes us all feel...on the basis that we all get it wrong, I assume that we all feel that we’re just useless. S7.36 |

Singers understandably felt that this confrontational and, at times, aggressive approach had a negative effect on the rehearsal environment as a whole. They also felt that it was demotivating and likely to affect confidence levels adversely (Table 6.49), not only regarding particular performances, but in relation to their general self-efficacy for singing.

Table 6.49. ‘Why am I putting myself through this?’

| |
|---|
| I have worked with conductors that just...well, it’s totally unreasonable. They rant. They <i>absolutely</i> rant. And it gets really quite personal. And it’s sort of a case of, you know, ‘I may as well pack my bags and go home. I don’t come and do this for this, that and the other’ – <i>total</i> ranting. And obviously that undermines your confidence. And you stand there and think ‘What am I <i>doing</i> here? Why am I putting myself through this?’ So I think that’s not great. S3.33 |
| The [conductor] who takes it on the night – he comes in on the penultimate rehearsal, and I think every time we’ve gone away and said ‘Actually, I’m not going to come on Sunday. There’s no point. We’re just rubbish. I don’t know what I’m supposed to be doing. I don’t know my words. I don’t know my notes’. And it seems to be, yeah, that your confidence...my confidence drops, and I think ‘I’m not going to do it!’ S7.35 |

When comparing various past conductors, S8 (Table 6.50) concluded that technical ability does not need to be accompanied by ‘aggression’ in order for a choir to succeed.

Table 6.50. ‘There’s nothing to be said for it’

| |
|---|
| [Conductor’s successor] was entirely different. He was a school teacher, but he was a different persona <i>completely</i> . And everybody had great respect for [him]. And, to be honest, technically, he wasn’t far off [his more aggressive predecessor]. He was as good as [him] and he took the choir to some good concerts and competitions, and we won, so there’s nothing to be said for it, that aggression. S8.59 |
|---|

6.2.12. Different Strokes

I mean, you can always do with a bit more rehearsal but...I just thought
‘Cor blimey! What standard does he think we are?!’
I mean, we were just a scratch choir! **S6.33-34**

S9 remarked that conductors (particularly those who are accustomed to working with children) sometimes do not recognise the need of adult learners for praise (Table 6.51), and emphasised the importance of this when trying to develop confidence amongst amateur singers.

Table 6.51. Adults need praise too

| |
|---|
| I think sometimes, with adults, peoples’ transition into ‘I’m OK with children but now I’m dealing with adults’ is tricky, and they forget that we want to be praised as well. S9.52 |
|---|

Several participants discussed the importance of matching the conductor’s approach with the ability of the singers, and having realistic expectations of adult amateur choirs (Table 6.52). Although some amateur singers are highly experienced and have received some musical training, others may have no previous choral experience or musical education at all. Feedback, praise and constructive criticism are

only effective if they are directed at an appropriate level, expressed with respect, and delivered in a way that facilitates positive affect amongst the singers, as well as musical attainment.

Table 6.52. 'We can't keep up with this'

They forget that there's a lot of us that are kind of [whispers] *very amateur* [...] It's much better if somebody does that with you [explains musical terms and symbols], and doesn't *assume* that everybody in the masses *knows* what it's all about. Also, they're not assuming 'When you go home and do this on the piano' [...] We haven't all got pianos at home. **S9.12**

I think the new leader wanted to move along too quickly. I think what she'd done was she'd committed herself to a performance, and had been a bit ambitious in the time scale. And she was trying to do all these new songs, with harmonies [...] and we just couldn't keep up. [...] And she kept saying 'Come on. Sing the song *with* me. I'm *dragging* you along!' 'Cause we were having to wait for the note on there [indicates keyboard] so that we knew what to sing. So she was playing it and then we were catching up, so she was dragging us along. So I thought 'Ooh, no. No, no. We can't keep up with this'. It was just hard work. **S12.9-10**

The experience I had at [choral society]...the guy we had there is music master at [school]...He comes in, goes through the line, goes 'la la la', sopranos 'la la la' – 'cause they're all fine 'cause they're singing the tune – basses 'la la la'. 'Right, now we'll do it!' And that's it, you know! [...] You just got the impression 'I'm not going to spend any more time on this! This is enough! You've done it!' As though he was with a professional chorus. [...] We all felt pretty ropey! **S6.33-34**

Even when the conductor has taken account of the needs of the adult amateur choir, and tried to pitch his or her teaching style appropriately, it is still a challenge to consider the different learning styles and paces of learning that may coexist amongst the individuals who comprise the ensemble (Table 6.53).

Table 6.53. Not everybody is the same

Some people can maybe pick it up fairly quickly and are on the ball maybe after a run through, but not everybody might be the same. Really, it takes me a bit longer to get to the heart of the matter. **FG3.C.52**

Some of us take longer to learn something than others. Therefore you're as good as your slowest learner, I suppose, aren't you? To a certain extent. To carry that slowest learner for a bit longer, until he gets it. **S8.58**

S9 (Table 6.54) expressed appreciation of a new conductor who had started to use his teaching skills to ensure that the singers became more familiar with some of the technical aspects of choral singing, rather than making assumptions about their pre-existing knowledge.

Table 6.54. Conductor as choir teacher

Those kind of things I'm now beginning to understand, because they're using the words, instead of just saying whatever and expecting that we all know, he's actually explaining it. And he's doing it as a *teacher* more. But he *is* a teacher, and he teaches all different ages. And it's much better if somebody does that with you, and doesn't *assume* that everybody in the masses *knows* what it's all about. **S9.12**

This singer recognised her own limitations, and described her needs in terms of 'nurturing' as well as teaching (Table 6.55). At times, these needs of adult amateur singers may be neglected.

Table 6.55. Nurturing

I'm slightly out of my depth with the [choral society], and sometimes I need a little bit of nurturing! **S9.6**

Providing a helpful amount of feedback, with the optimum balance of criticism and praise, which is delivered in an appropriate style and at an appropriate level for the individual singers, taking into account their age, experience and musical training (and, in some cases, their limitations), can be a tall order. A number of singers accordingly acknowledged the demands, for their conductors, of working with mixed ability amateur choirs of different sizes and backgrounds (Table 6.56).

Table 6.56. 'Different walks of life'

When you've got a choir of seventy, and you've got lots of readers, and lots of non-readers, and people that take longer to learn it, then your tolerance...you're gonna lose your rag aren't you? **S8.59**

You've got to remember that people who sing come from all walks of life. Some are very academic, some are very practical, some are...They're *different* people. Different characters coming together. But they're coming together to *sing*. **S14.35**

6.3 Thematic Summary

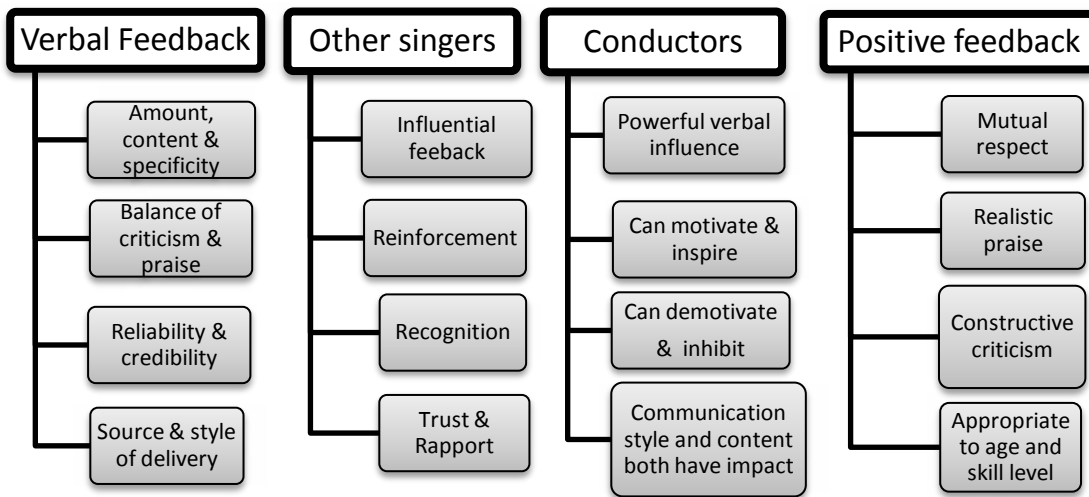
The superordinate theme of verbal communication builds on some of my findings regarding collective processes, collaborative learning and configurational effects on the functioning of the choir as a psychosocial entity. The subordinate themes of the amount, content, source and style of verbal feedback (see Figure 8) were significant for the majority of participants, and feedback from musical peers was an influential factor in confidence development. Verbal feedback from musical experts, particularly the choral conductor, had a particularly powerful effect on perceptions of performance quality, as well as upon individual and group efficacy.

The earlier descriptions of the choir as a team (see chapter 5) were reflected in the participants' acknowledgement of the importance of verbal feedback from their fellow singers, and their expression of a need for trust, rapport and mutual respect in the rehearsal environment. These elements were viewed as pre-requisites for meaningful, confidence-building feedback from the conductor as well as from their peers.

The subordinate themes relating to verbal communication reinforce the model of multi-directional group learning developed in chapter 5, and may further explain some of the singers' preferences for choral configurations that allow close contact with their peers, and for consistent positions which may allow mutual trust and rapport to develop between neighbouring singers (see chapter 4).

The role of verbal communication in amateur choral confidence will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Figure 8. Verbal communication and choral confidence



6.4. DISCUSSION

6.4.1. Amount and Type of Feedback

For the participants in this study, the superordinate theme of feedback encompassed the amount, content, style of delivery, and source of criticism and praise. Subordinate themes also included finding an effective balance between criticism and praise; specificity and honesty of feedback; realism and credibility of praise; negative responses to criticism of individuals and small groups. Themes relating to feedback from conductors included the importance of: communicating in an age-appropriate manner for the members of adult amateur choirs; taking account of the experience and skill level of adult amateur singers; fostering rapport and mutual respect to facilitate a supportive environment in which meaningful feedback can be given and received with confidence.

Although there may be individual differences in responses to feedback (Bandura and Cervone, 1986; Baron, 1988; Brophy, 1981; Kanouse et al., 1981), there was a broad consensus amongst the current participants, with reference to the association between the various aspects of feedback and self-efficacy. Positive feedback was regarded, by all participants, as a valuable part of confidence building, and was described as having motivational qualities. Lack of any kind of feedback was seen as demotivating, and linked with feelings of insecurity and self-doubt. For this reason a desire for a higher level of feedback, both in terms of quantity and detail, was consistently expressed. This contrasts with some of the evidence, in music education research, that a high level of ‘teacher talk’ may have an adverse effect on the student’s

attentiveness, attainment and affect (Nápoles 2006; Nápoles and Vázquez-Ramos 2013; Spradling 1985; Witt 1986; Yarbrough and Price 1981).

Although rehearsing has many parallels with other teaching situations, age-related differences may mean that some of the research in school and college classroom environments may not be directly applicable to the learning that takes place in adult amateur choral rehearsals. The amount of feedback (teacher talk), the effectiveness of positive compared with negative feedback, and the optimal balance between praise and criticism may vary according to group composition. Participants in earlier studies often derived effective positive reinforcement simply from participating in the musical activity studied (Spradling, 1985; Witt, 1986), and seemed to prefer this practical, intrinsic reward to verbal interaction (Nápoles, 2006; Nápoles and Vázquez-Ramos, 2013; Yarbrough and Price, 1981). Regular verbal reinforcement was more highly valued by the adult amateur participants in this study, partly as a means of facilitating the sense of community from which the interviewees derived a sense of rapport, trust and self-confidence. This may be because these participants placed a high premium on the social benefits of their choral singing activities, including group cohesion, comradeship and collaboration (see Chapter 5). Once mutual feelings of rapport and respect were well established in the rehearsal environment, feedback from fellow choir members, as well as from the conductor, was reported as being particularly trusted and appreciated,

The above differences between my results and some of the previous research into the role of feedback may partly be due to the research focus of the current study, as the studies cited above have tended to be more strongly related to attainment and attention, rather than to confidence levels. The new findings emerging from this study

reflect the fact that the way in which an individual's progress is evaluated during the giving of feedback can 'strongly affect their self-efficacy appraisal and thereby alter the course of their attainment' (Bandura, 1993; 125). The beneficial effects of positive feedback, given in sufficient quantities, in a realistic and appropriate manner for the adult recipients, with specific detail to allow improvements, are likely to include growth in self-efficacy and improvements in amateur choral performance. This can create a self-perpetuating virtuous circle of mastery experiences and increased confidence.

6.4.2. Credible Praise and Constructive Criticism

The participants in the current study preferred generous amounts of feedback, as a lack of feedback made them doubt themselves and feel insecure. However, they also felt that they needed a healthy balance of realistic, credible praise, tempered with constructive, performance-related criticism. Too little praise made them feel less confident, whilst an overdose of extravagant praise made them doubt the credibility, honesty and sincerity of the praise-giver. A lack of specific, constructive criticism also led to feelings of insecurity amongst the singers, as they felt uninformed about the standards expected by the conductor, and began to doubt his or her judgement, suspecting a lack of discrimination in the evaluation. All of this has serious implications for choral confidence building, as it supports the suggestion that general, over-effusive feedback, which is seen by the recipients as undeserved, can result in uncertainty (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Kanouse et al., 1981).

Davis and Brock (1972) found that extreme or 'inordinate' praise resulted in greater self-criticism in college students than mild or 'condign' praise, and that those

receiving the former rated themselves significantly less favourably. The participants in the current study who commented upon over-effusive praise, experienced a mismatch between their own standards and expectations of their performance, and those of the conductor. This may partly explain why they find such praise difficult to accept, and even associate it with a loss of confidence. Feedback which is not seen as honest or realistic is likely to cause the recipient to doubt the integrity, credibility and reliability of the feedback provider. The use of specific, realistic praise, when judiciously balanced with constructive criticism, is more likely to help recipients to perceive the praise as appropriate, genuine and deserved.

For choral performers, the audience is an additional source of feedback, which can be useful for the development of performance skills and for confidence building. However, according to the participants in this study, audience feedback is only helpful if it is seen as trustworthy and reliable. Feedback from trusted, well informed audience members was valued, whilst praise that was not perceived as genuine or honest, again, resulted in uncertainty and doubt about the quality of the performance. This demonstrates that the findings of earlier studies on this subject (Davis and Brock, 1972; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Kanouse et al., 1981) are applicable to audience feedback as well as to that received from teachers and, in this case, musical leaders. Whilst some friends and family members could reportedly be relied upon to deliver honest feedback after performances, others were suspected of giving praise that was indiscriminate or undeserved. This feedback was seen as less credible, and therefore less valuable in terms of musical and affective reinforcement, than praise from disinterested strangers, discerning peers or musical experts.

6.4.3. Authority and Responsibility

There is long-established evidence that the source of the feedback, and the perceived status and expertise of the evaluator has an important impact on the acceptance and value of the feedback (Catano, 1975, 1976; Kanouse et al., 1981; Stock, 1978). My findings demonstrate that this is a significant factor for amateur choral singers, who tend to place great importance on the opinion of their musical leaders, as well as on feedback received from those peers who are perceived as particularly skilled or musically experienced. This places a great responsibility on conductors, as their feedback can clearly have a powerful influence on performance quality and singers' subsequent sense of task mastery, as well as on their subjective affect and perceived self-efficacy. However, my evidence regarding the impact of peer praise and criticism also places some responsibility on choir members, as their influence upon the feelings, perceptions and confidence of those around them should not be underestimated.

In the introduction to this chapter, it was noted that there is evidence that a combination of positively expressed, constructive criticism and specific, credible praise can expedite learning and improve performance in educational settings (Baron, 1988; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Kanouse et al., 1981). For the adult participants in the current study, praise, particularly from conductors and respected peers, was clearly motivational and made a significant contribution to confidence building in choral rehearsals and performance.

6.4.4. Conductor Communication

Amongst the participants in this study, justifiable, constructive criticism was generally perceived as not only acceptable, but as an essential part of the learning process.

However, there is also clear evidence that the feedback in amateur choral rehearsal and performance situations is not always beneficial. Despite the high value placed on constructive criticism and praise from their musical leaders, some participants reported that the feedback received from conductors often fell short of the feedback that they felt would be most helpful for confidence building. Shortcomings were described in terms of the amount of feedback, the content and style of delivery, the balance between praise and criticism, and the credibility and trustworthiness of the feedback received.

Regarding the conductor's contribution in this respect, the amount of negative feedback, and the confrontational, 'schoolmasterly', patronising or even, at times, destructive style of delivery reported by some participants, had dramatic effects in terms of reducing performance quality, decreasing motivation, and undermining the confidence of the singers. In some cases, this was reported as a result of the conductor failing to consider the maturity of the singers, their skill levels and requirements for learning support. It may also be that some conductors do not fully appreciate that amateur singers' motivation for participating in choral activities is often based on enjoyment and social cohesion as much as (or perhaps, for some individuals, more than) musical attainment. Some participants felt that their conductors had not taken account some of the implications of the amateur status of the choir members, and that some of the negative feedback, which sometimes felt unjustified, was derived from a lack of understanding of their limitations, coupled with a lack of consideration of their

needs. This is consistent with Leonhard's (1980) criticism of directors of choirs in educational settings, who can sometimes be guilty of adopting a 'quasi-professional' approach, and using singers to further their own musical ambitions rather than prioritising the singers' learning and enjoyment of the experience.

Singling out individual singers and small sections of the ensemble for criticism was widely felt to be an ineffective way of improving performance. The results were often extremely negative for the recipients of this kind of public criticism, and for the choir as a whole, as it created a less than supportive rehearsal environment and, for some, led to a dread of public humiliation. All participants indicated that destructive criticism is never productive in these settings, and that some conductors tended to forget that adults need a certain amount of praise as well as criticism. The amount and level of praise preferred by adult amateur singers may relate to the literature on the differences between obligatory and voluntary activity, as negative feedback has been found to be more effective in obligatory activities (presumably due to avoidance considerations) whilst positive feedback is more effective in voluntary spheres (Van-Dijk and Kluger, 2000, 2001, cited in Hattie and Timperley, 2007). This is presumably because a surfeit of negative feedback would simply result in a curtailment of participation in voluntary activities, as evidenced by the participants who described leaving choirs as a result of destructive criticism (Tables 6.25 and 6.26).

Research relating to self-defined 'non-singers' has identified negative feedback regarding singing, when received in childhood, and particularly when delivered by influential adults and those who are perceived as musical experts, as having a lasting adverse effect upon vocal confidence (Knight, 1999, 2011). Those who have been negatively affected by being told that they don't sing well as children, often

thereafter see this as being an irrevocable state rather than regarding singing as a learned musical behaviour which can develop and improve with age and training (Welch, 1986, 2005). Many adults never recover from early discouraging experiences related to their vocal ability, unless they are exposed to some form of intervention, such as specific vocal training (Welch, 1994, 2001; Wise and Sloboda, 2008) or the opportunity to participate in positive communal experiences of singing designed to build vocal confidence in self-professed 'non-singers' (Richards and Durrant, 2003). The current study shows that negative feedback can also have a strong impact on confidence amongst adult amateur choral singers. The source of the feedback has a similar effect amongst adult performers to that seen amongst children, with the most influence attributed to feedback from those who are perceived as musical experts.

In an exploration of music performance anxiety amongst semi-professional chorus singers (Ryan and Andrews, 2009), the conductor emerged as one of the major influences on MPA, and further research into the conductor's contribution to subjective affect amongst singers was recommended. The current findings indicate that, in amateur choral settings, collective and collaborative processes are also important influences on learning, performance and confidence. Constructive, confidence-building interactions between singers include positive feedback, verbal support and encouragement, and mutual validation, as well as peer modelling and reciprocal learning (see Chapter 5). However, the content and style of the conductor's feedback still has a significant impact on confidence levels amongst adult amateur singers. Some of the implications of these findings will be discussed in the following chapter, along with a set of associated recommendations.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 THEMATIC OVERVIEW OF THESIS

The thematic summaries within of the four preceding chapters (see figures 5, 6, 7 and 8) illustrated the main findings in terms of the four superordinate themes emerging from the data, and the associated subordinate themes. A summative illustration of the factors contributing to confident choral performance is now presented (see figure 9) as a quick reference to my findings.

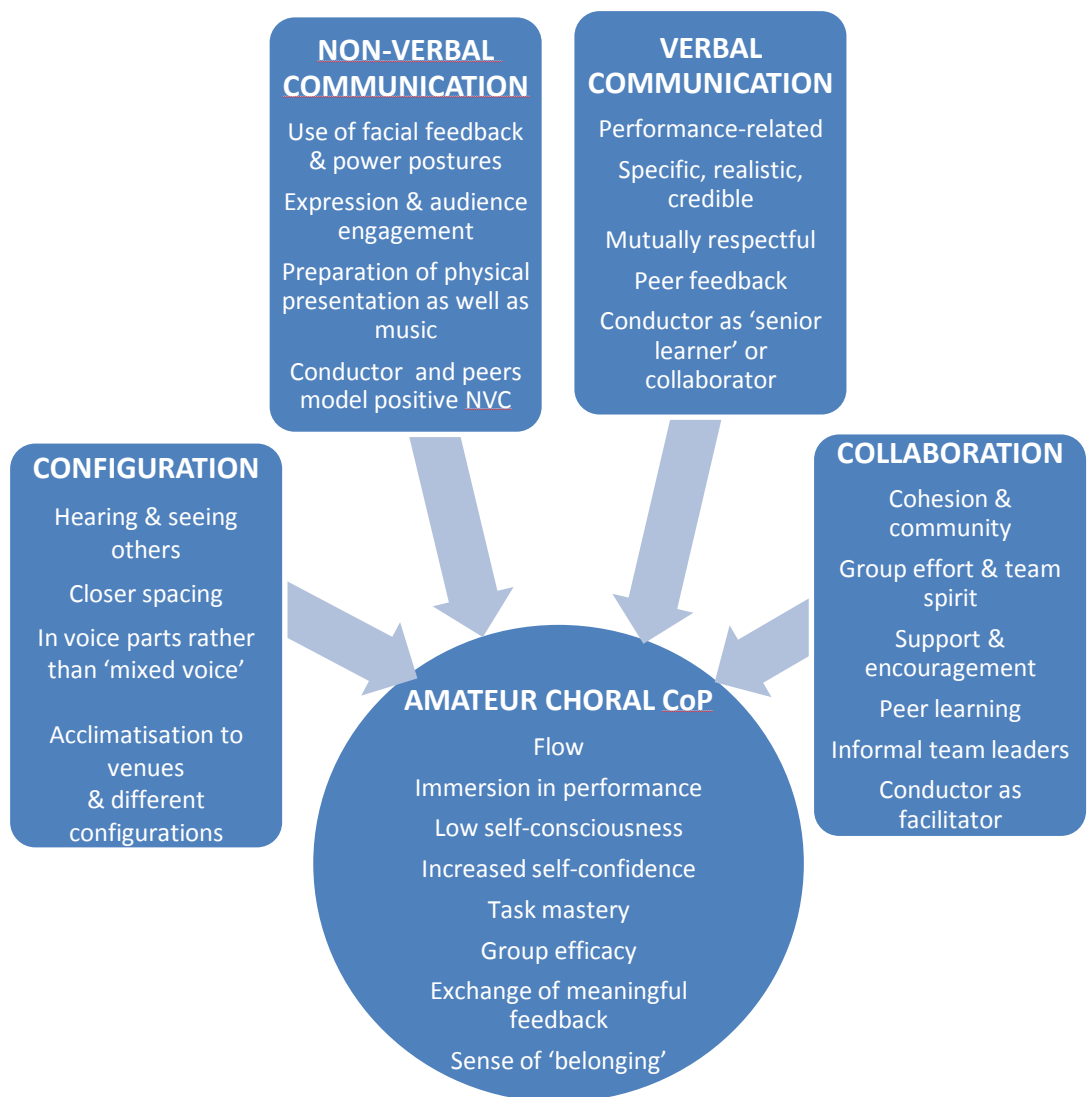


Figure 9. Main factors contributing to choral confidence

The emergent themes interact with each other in many ways. For example, aspects of choral configuration have an effect upon the amateur singers' ability to hear their fellow performers, which in turn has an effect upon their subjective perceptions of both the performance quality and their own enjoyment of the event. Distractions derived from concerns about the inter-related effects of configuration and acoustics can reduce the likelihood of experiencing a state of flow and its associated benefits.

The prioritisation of hearing and seeing fellow choir members is largely due to some of the collective and reciprocal processes evident in amateur choirs. In turn, these collaborative processes have strong links with the emergent themes of verbal and non-verbal communication (NVC). Verbal feedback from the conductor has a clear influence on choral self-efficacy, but singer to singer feedback also plays a significant role in collective learning and confidence levels. The value of facial feedback and mirroring positive posture amongst choir members, as well as within the singer-conductor dyad, is also related to the amateur singers' preferences for configurations which allow them to see other performers.

The main findings regarding the effects of choir configuration, verbal and non-verbal communication, and collaboration all relate to the functioning of the choir as a community of practice (CoP). Each of these factors has an impact on the effectiveness of the choral CoP and, in turn, upon the likelihood of achieving a flow state in which performance quality and enjoyment are enhanced, whilst self-consciousness is reduced and confidence is increased. A more detailed discussion of the interaction between the principal themes will take place later in this chapter, along with a consideration of some of the main implications.

7.2. EXPECTATIONS V. FINDINGS

The original aims of this research have largely been fulfilled, through a comprehensive exploration of the lived experience of amateur choral singers. As initially hoped, many factors affecting singers' confidence in their performance ability have been established. Their general perceptions and definitions of confident performance have been obtained, and a number of collaborative, communal and cohesive influences have been identified. There has also been an examination of the specific role of praise and criticism in the development of individual and collective efficacy in the choral context. From these findings some potential strategies can be extrapolated to help to manage confidence issues and build self-efficacy amongst amateur choral singers. The implications arising from the emergent themes will be discussed in the following sections. However, before summarising the main findings and presenting the resulting recommendations, it is worth examining some of the differences between my original expectations and the results emerging from the data.

Firstly, it quickly became apparent that the research aim of identifying some of the main influences on singers' perceptions of their vocal ability was not particularly relevant to the subject of choral confidence. A question had been formulated, which was directed at discovering whether or not the attribution of vocal ability has an influence on confidence amongst choral singers, as initially suggested by an examination of theories of achievement motivation and attribution (Weiner, 1972, 1974, 1979, 1985). However, although participants had a range of attributions relating to their own and other singers' ability, there did not appear to be a strong relationship between these attributions and amateur performers' self-efficacy for choral singing. Attributions of musical or vocal ability are more likely to have an effect on whether

individuals choose to participate in ensemble singing (Richards and Durrant, 2003), and on whether people view themselves as 'non-singers'.

Secondly, I had initially speculated that some of the factors that deter self-professed 'non-singers' from participating in choral activities, such as demotivating and discouraging comments from authoritative adults during their childhood (Knight, 1999, 2011) may also have an impact on confidence levels amongst amateur choral singers. However, little evidence for this emerged during my research, as the majority of participants focused on their experiences of ensemble singing during adulthood rather than dwelling on formative events. A small minority of individuals shared similar experiences to those related in the above-mentioned research on 'non-singers', such as overbearing, judgemental family members (S2 and FG2.B) or abusive instrumental teachers (S1 and S3), but there was not a high enough incidence of this for it to be classed as a significant theme.

The majority of participants concentrated on current concerns related to the group endeavour of the choral ensemble, which may, in part, have been due to the group setting of the earlier interviews. This tendency, however, continued in the individual interviews, which is likely to have been because the interview schedule focused on choral singing activities rather than solo situations. The divergence between some of my original speculations and the findings may also be due to the emergent research design, which allowed for themes to emerge based on participants' experiences and perceptions, rather than on my own expectations (Goodson and Sikes, 2001).

It is noteworthy that the small minority who described being adversely affected by childhood events had nonetheless maintained a strong interest in musical

performance and choral singing, which places them in a different category from self-defined 'non-singers'. This suggests that positive choral experiences obtained by adult singers can override past aversive experiences. However, my data indicate that, even amongst experienced amateur singers, choral confidence is affected by the amount, content, style and delivery of feedback, particularly from respected peers and musical experts (see Chapter 6). Other significant influences on confidence levels include group dynamics and musical leadership; practical and situational considerations, such as venues, acoustics and choir configuration; presentation and body language; personal appearance, preparation and pre-performance rituals.

Since my findings have been presented thematically, with the aim of reflecting the inductive nature of this phenomenological study, the remainder of this chapter will similarly be structured according to the themes as they emerged from the data. Four superordinate categories, based on the findings presented in chapters 3-6, will be discussed, and have been allocated descriptive designations reflecting the main content of the findings. The thematic sections in this chapter have been organised into the following superordinate categories:

- Non-verbal communication: physical presentation and preparation
- Choir configuration and choral acoustics
- Collaboration in the choral community of practice
- Verbal communication: the role of feedback in choral confidence

Each of the thematic sections will commence with a summary of the main findings relating to the superordinate theme to be considered, followed by a set of relevant conclusions and recommendations. Although the main focus of this study has been upon the individual singer and their experiences within the choral environment,

the recommendations will be principally intended for choral conductors and teachers, as the findings indicate a number of significant implications for musical leadership. The final section of this chapter will provide a brief summary of the thesis as a whole in order to highlight some of the interrelationships between the emergent themes.

7.3. NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION: PHYSICAL PRESENTATION AND PREPARATION

7.3.1. Summary of Findings

- The participants defined the portrayal and perception of self-confidence in terms of non-verbal communication (NVC), including posture, body language, facial expression, expressive performance, and engagement with the audience
- The ability to become immersed in the music and the performance was seen as confidence building
- It was acknowledged that a confidence boosting level of engagement and immersion is only possible with thorough preparation and practice
- Distractions which detracted from immersion in the performance included insecurities related to physical entries and exits, and positioning within the performance space
- Confidence was described as being derived from feeling secure in terms of musical preparation and physical presentation during performance
- It was felt that preparation should therefore include attention to the collective presentation of the choir, as well as thorough musical rehearsal
- There was a widespread recognition of the 'contagious' effects of NVC and its potential to influence confidence positively and negatively

- The positive effects of modelling confident posture, body language and facial expression, by choir members as well as musical leaders, were recognised
- Being able to see each other was therefore felt to be helpful for sharing positive NVC in order to build confidence

7.3.2. Expression, Immersion and Flow

When asked to describe attributes of confident performers, the majority of participants cited body language, posture and non-verbal communication. It was generally felt that these aspects of performance add significantly to the impression that the singer is expressively interpreting the music, that their absorption in the performance is complete, and that their performance has an effortless quality associated with mastery. Total immersion in the music was mentioned as a way of distracting oneself from any performance ‘nerves,’ as well as looking and feeling more confident in one’s own performance. All of this relates to flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), which describes the enjoyment, lack of self-consciousness, and resultant self-confidence derived from concentration and task-absorption (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Optimising the environmental and situational settings so that flow conditions may be attained may therefore form an effective strategy for developing confident choral performance.

Since the achievement of flow, with its associated increase in confidence, is facilitated by total immersion in task performance, minimising extraneous distractions is an important part of developing choral self-efficacy. Many participants stressed the importance of adequate preparation, including notes, words, cues, physical entries and

exits; familiarisation with the acoustics and layout of the performance venue; and factors related to individual and collective presentation, appearance and comfort. It is difficult to become totally absorbed in the pleasures of the performance and the enjoyment of the music if one is concerned about other, seemingly peripheral issues, which can clearly assume great significance for some amateur singers. Concerns relating to lack of preparation, physical comfort, and acclimatisation to venue space and room acoustics can all provide unwelcome distractions from the task in hand, reducing the singers' concentration, adversely affecting their performance, reducing their sense of mastery, and consequently lowering their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

7.3.3. Modelling and sharing positive non-verbal communication

This study provides new evidence that the conductor's contribution to choral confidence is not only linked with preparation (in terms of musical rehearsal, interpretation and aesthetic presentation during performance) but also with modelling confident posture, body language, stage deportment and facial expression. There is no shortage of choral conducting literature indicating that 'what they see is what you get' (Garnett, 2009: 170), meaning that the sound emanating from the singers reflects the posture, conducting style and gesture that they see in the choral director:

If the sound coming back to you is not what you want, you must be willing to accept that the sound is a mirror image of your conducting. (Jordan, 1996: 9)

However, the main findings of the majority of previous work in this area have been concerned with gesture and its effect on performance quality rather than on the

effects of the conductor's body language on choral confidence. It is notable, however, that tense conducting gestures convey physical and vocal tension to the singers (Kaplan, 1985), and the conductor's general posture has a strong impact on the appearance of the choir:

The correct basic posture for a choral conductor is identical to what we seek to develop in the singers (Hylton, 1995: 95).

This tendency amongst singers to replicate the conductor's body language and facial expressions means that the conductor should embody the 'sort of sound he would like to make if only he could sing all the parts at once' (Reynolds, 1972: 6). Modelling a tense posture results in vocal tension within the choir (Decker and Kirk, 1988), whilst modelling an expansive posture can help singers to keep their own ribs expanded, with beneficial effects on breath control and vocal production (Roe, 1983). The conductor's facial expression (in particular his or her non-verbal modelling of 'lip rounding') can also affect choral tone (Daugherty and Brunkan, 2013).

My findings demonstrate that the facial expression and body language of the conductor can affect confidence levels as well as choral sound. Leading by example, even if not feeling genuinely confident, and expressing (or even mimicking) confidence through non-verbal communication will help choral singers to reflect back positive body language, which will help to create positive affect, improve performance, increase their sense of task mastery, and enhance perceived self-efficacy. Any improvements in vocal production and tone as a by-product of the conductor's modelling of positive body language and facial expression, is also likely to enhance the singers' confidence in their own performance, as they become aware of these improvements.

The 'chameleon effect' (Chartrand and Bargh, 1999) has been confirmed as being effective between singers, as well as within the singer-conductor dyad, with positive effects on choral performance (Garnett, 2009). Based on my findings, the emotional contagion (Falkenberg et al., 2008) derived from non-verbal communication (NVC) between singers has a significant impact on confidence levels amongst adult amateur choral singers, as well as upon performance quality.

Modelling confident postures and facial expressions was seen by the participants as an effective tool in building self-efficacy amongst choral singers. It was indicated that, even if the subjective affect was not initially genuine, the adoption of positive body language contributed to the sensation and portrayal of confidence. This finding relates to the well-established role of the subjective interpretation of physiological sensations in an individual's level of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1982). Positive NVC should therefore be strongly encouraged amongst performers, in order to ensure that postural and facial feedback can be used to their greatest advantage. Physical warm-ups which include paying attention to posture and expression may help with this. Positioning singers, where possible, so that they can see each others' facial expressions is also likely to be helpful in this respect, as well as ensuring that all singers have an unimpeded view of the conductor's positive body language.

7.4. CHOIR CONFIGURATION AND CHORAL ACOUSTICS

7.4.1 Summary of Findings

- A preferred SOR (self-to-other ratio) which prioritises the singers' ability to hear other choir members (reference) rather than his or her own voice (feedback)
- A preference for close inter-singer spacing to facilitate the reference-based SOR

- A preference for choir formations that allow singers to see and hear each other clearly
- A dislike of 'mixed voice' formations as these do not facilitate the preferred SOR
- A preference for singing in vocal parts rather than 'mixed voice' formations, so that those singing the same melodic or harmonic line are clearly audible
- A need to see the conductor clearly for confident performance
- Marked preferences regarding individual positioning within the choir
- A widespread need for consistency of formation and position
- An association between perceived acoustic differences (commonly related to changes of individual position within the choir or within the venue) and adverse effects on self-confidence and subjective perceptions of performance quality
- A stated need for more opportunities to rehearse in the performance venue, where possible, in order to acclimatise to variations related to the interaction between room acoustics and choir configuration
- A recognition of the potential benefits of developing positional flexibility during rehearsals, in order to accommodate configurational changes which may be necessitated by the size and shape of the performance venue

7.4.2. Situating the Singer

My study has established that adult amateur singers respond strongly to some of the acoustic and practical challenges of choral performance, and has ascertained that there is potential value in considering choir configuration as a tool for improving the singers' subjective auditory experience and enhancing the confidence levels of amateur choral performers.

As an embodied instrument (Thurman and Welch, 2000), the choral singer is located within the choir as a whole, and within the physical setting, such as the rehearsal room or concert venue. The emergent themes in this study have demonstrated that position, spacing, choir layout and position within the venue consequently have an important impact on how singers feel during performance and rehearsal. These aspects of choir configuration can influence the singers' perceptions of their vocal performance, their confidence in their abilities, and in their confidence that they will be able to hear and see the other singers, the conductor and any accompanying instruments.

All of these factors are particularly important for singers, as they are already disadvantaged by the difficulty of hearing themselves. This is partly due to their unique position in relation to their own vocal instrument (Miller, 1996), and to the inevitable subjectivity of their perception of their own vocal output (Alderson, 1979). These acoustic challenges are compounded by the particular demands of ensemble singing. The subjective perception of a combination of air-borne and bone-conducted sound (McKinney, 1994) means that choral singers can never hear themselves in the same way that they hear the other singers in the choir (Ternström and Karna, 2002). Hence they are easily distracted or disconcerted if they cannot hear each other, fearing that the blend may not be pleasing to the audience, as well as being concerned that they may be unwittingly making errors of intonation, pitch, or timing.

When positioning choirs, and singers within the ensemble, their physical comfort and perceptions therefore need to be taken into account to some extent, whilst at the same time bearing in mind the usual considerations, such as achieving an aurally satisfying balance between and within the vocal parts. As a confident

performance is more likely to be a competent performance, it is worth giving some attention to the placement of individual singers, as well as ensuring that the choir as a whole is well positioned. In this way it may be possible to satisfy the dual aims of achieving optimal sound quality and maximising choral confidence.

7.4.3. Hearing Each Other in Closer Spacing

Previous studies have found that singers preferred a positive self-to-other ratio (SOR) of +6dB, which allowed them to hear themselves above their neighbours, and which was facilitated by comparatively wider inter-singer spacing (Ternström, 1999). However, my findings were significantly different from these results. For the participants in the current study, the priority was to hear the other singers, which was facilitated by closer spacing.

It has previously been acknowledged that SOR preferences are subject to some variation between singers:

Tastes varied wildly, from +15 dB down to 0 dB. In other words, some of these singers wanted to hear their own voice a lot, while others preferred the rest of the choir to be just as loud. (Ternström and Karna, 2002: 272)

As preferred SOR varies from singer to singer, preferences regarding inter-singer spacing are also likely to vary. In addition to variations in individual preferences, it is also necessary to take into account the fact that every group of singers is different (Daugherty, 1999). In addition to this, the interaction of the room acoustics with the choral sound means that different lay-outs, positions and spacing may be effective for different choirs in different venues. My findings suggest that these differences may be related to vocal skill, musicianship, and self-confidence.

Choir size may also be a relevant variable. When singers prefer a positive SOR, comparatively large choirs may require a wider area of floor space per singer than smaller choirs (Ternström, 1999). The physical lay-out of the choir has a further effect on SOR and spacing preferences:

Having the choir stand in many rows will cause large differences in SOR between the centre and the periphery of the choir, since some singers will have many neighbors and others will have few. In single-row formations, the SOR varies less with position in the choir. (Ternström and Karna, 2002: 273)

Further research would be necessary to ascertain whether amateur singers who perform with larger choirs consistently report similar preferences with regard to SOR and choir spacing. However, it should be noted that the participants in the current study who sang in larger choirs expressed similar preferences to those performing in chamber ensembles.

It is acknowledged that the results of this study are not necessarily to be generalised to other populations. Different results might be obtained by using different kinds of ensembles, more or fewer singers, older or younger choristers, or comparisons of a choir's sound in different acoustic environments (Daugherty, 1999). It is beyond the scope of this study to carry out acoustic experimentation to confirm and further explore the complex interactions of factors such as preferred SOR, spacing and choral formation, room acoustics and choir size with confidence levels amongst amateur choral singers. However, this would be a fruitful area for future empirical research, with particular reference to the effects of choir formation, position and spacing on the confidence of amateur choral singers, along with the potential for using different configurations to optimise group efficacy.

There is unlikely to be a 'one size fits all' solution for the choral director attempting to make the 'right choice' for his choir when considering choir formation and spacing. This is largely because SOR preferences are affected by room acoustics and reflectors, and may also vary between individual choir members, depending upon the level of their own vocal output or sound pressure level (Ternström, 1999). However, these are clearly aspects of choral performance that are worth considering carefully, not simply in relation to creating the most satisfying choral blend for the audience, but also when trying to create a confidence-building acoustic environment for the singers.

7.4.4. Choir Formation and Confidence

It has been acknowledged that the mixed voice formation preferred in earlier studies was largely based on perceptions of the choral blend, rather than on subjective affect (Daugherty, 1999, 2003), and that these configurations could be unsuitable for less experienced or less confident amateur choirs as 'this may well reduce confidence and self-esteem if the singers feel threatened' (Durrant, 2003: 131). This has been reflected in my findings, as most participants disliked mixed voice formations, feeling more secure when arranged in sections, according to voice parts. These preferences do not appear to be a function of experience (see also Bonshor, 2002), as the majority of participants in the current study were long-established choral singers, with a wide range of performance experience. These findings are, arguably, more likely to be explained in terms of the relative lack of formal musical training, compared with participants in previous studies (Aspaas et al., 2004; Daugherty, 2003; Ekholm, 2000; Lambson, 1961). Alternatively, it may simply be that less confident singers do not cope well with mixed voice formations. When planning choral formation and spacing, and

making decisions about individual voice placement within the choir, the concept of taking into account the confidence levels, as well as the musical training and ability of the singers, could be particularly useful for developing self-efficacy within amateur ensembles.

In addition to prioritising the need for choir configurations that allow the singers to hear each other, the participants in this study favoured formations that allowed them to see their fellow performers. It is acknowledged that this is not always possible, especially in larger ensembles, but participants reported that it was helpful to see other singers' facial expressions for positive reinforcement (see Chapter 3), as well as for musical cues.

The effect of familiarity with particular formations should be taken into account, as it has been cited as a potential influence in previous research on choral configuration (Apaas et al., 2004; Daugherty, 1999; Ternström, 1999). The majority of the participants in my research sang regularly with at least one chamber choir of twenty members or fewer, in which the formation is often that of a single-row 'horse shoe'. They expressed a preference for this formation over the less frequently-used sectional 'clusters'. The fact that they usually stand in a single 'horse-shoe shaped' row, may explain their relatively cohesive views relating to choral acoustics and choir configuration.

7.4.5. Choir Position and Individual Placement

My findings indicate that, in addition to the effects of choir spacing and formation, position is also a factor that has significance for amateur singers. In the context of this study, 'position' relates to the position of the choir within the venue, and in relation to

the conductor and the orchestral or piano accompaniment. It also relates to the position of the individual singer in relation to his or her fellow singers within the vocal section, and in relation to the other voice parts. Finally, for some amateur singers, it also includes the position of the singer in relation to more proficient singers or team leaders (see Chapter 5). All of these variables had some importance for the majority of the participants. In practical terms, musical cues and confidence provided by singer to singer interaction could be optimised by judicious ‘voice placement’ (Lamb, 2010) based on relative strengths and weaknesses, in terms of vocal strength, accuracy of intonation and sight-singing skills. The relative confidence levels of individual singers could also be taken into account by placing less secure singers next to more confident performers. Although there are no clear acoustic advantages to using the various different formations (Aspaas et al., 2004; Daugherty, 2003), there are, according to the current study, some potential advantages in terms of using various configurational elements to provide support for particular singers or sections of the choir. This suggests some of the following practical applications for building choral confidence.

7.4.6. Flexibility and Variation

In the absence of an ideal choral formation which is suitable for all ensembles and all repertoires, some flexibility regarding placement may allow conductors to respond more effectively to the needs of the singers, and to the contingencies of different performing situations. In this way, the perceptions of the singers regarding the interaction between situational factors (such as room absorbency and reverberation), their individual vocal contribution, and the overall sound, may be taken into account. A shift away from a total concentration upon choral blend, towards a more holistic

approach to choir formation, spacing and position, may facilitate a discernible improvement in individual and collective choral self-efficacy.

It has been suggested that there may be advantages in involving the singers in the decision-making in this area (Durrant, 2003; Ternström, 1999). Admittedly, coordinating this could be unwieldy, especially as some preferences regarding seating are likely to be based on internal politics and interpersonal relationships. Within reason, however, some of these preferences should be accommodated to ensure the smooth running of the choir, which is a social entity as well as a musical ensemble (Lamb, 2010). From the point of view of confidence levels, it is clear that performing in the shadow of an intimidating or unsupportive colleague is unlikely to result in a positive choral experience, and that responding proactively to such situations may produce a favourable change in group dynamics.

7.4.7. Adapting to different venues and configurations

The difficulties described by the participants in my study include the fact that acoustic differences between rehearsal rooms and performance venues can be unsettling and affect confidence. It is understood that the layout of the choir may, on occasions, have to be changed from that generally used in rehearsal, largely due to space restrictions in the performance venue, or the particular layout of the performing area. Such concerns can clearly be addressed either by providing more rehearsal time in the venue or by spending some time rehearsing in the projected 'concert formation', as determined by the nature of the performance space, rather than remaining in the habitual rehearsal configuration.

Even when rehearsals are held at the performance venue, the room acoustics may feel different to the choir during performance, as compared with a rehearsal situation, simply due to the added absorption caused by the presence of the audience (Daugherty, 2001). Their performance and self-efficacy may also be adversely affected by being unable to stand next to their usual neighbours if the configuration of the choir has had to change due to the layout of the venue. One of the strategies suggested as a means of minimising these problems is to experiment with different choir formations in rehearsals, which should 'encourage flexibility...with regard to their position in the choir [and] get them used to hearing different voices around them' (Durrant, 2003: 130). As spacing has been shown to have a significant effect on choral sound and blend, singers could also be encouraged to try different spacings during rehearsals, to desensitise them to some of the acoustic changes inherent in moving from the rehearsal room to the concert venue.

7.4.8. Configuration, Acoustics and Confidence

Since previous studies have found that choir formation in itself makes little difference to independent evaluations of choral sound quality and blend, compared with inter-singer spacing (Aspaas et al., 2004; Daugherty, 2003), decisions regarding choir formation and voice placement could be based on some of the factors that may assist the singers to sing more confidently. These factors include being able to hear other singers, so that they can concentrate on holding their own harmonic or melodic line, maintain pitch and rhythm, and gain support from stronger singers and readers. It may therefore be helpful to place less secure singers near confident, more highly skilled, performers. Also, since hearing the other singers during performance was such an

important concern for many participants in this study, formations and combinations of voicings which enable singers to hear the voice parts that are most relevant to their vocal line could be considered. In practical terms, this might vary according to the nature of the repertoire.

It should be noted that some of the factors relating to choral confidence, such as voice placement and positioning of the choir, are subject to the influence of the conductor, but others are not entirely within his or her remit. The choral director is not responsible, for example, for the acoustics of the rehearsal or concert venue, although, in some instances, he or she may have some input into decisions regarding the choice of venue. A conductor can help singers to adjust to difficult acoustics, either by giving advice about how to compensate for this as they perform, or by providing reassurance about the effects of the acoustics, from the point of view of the listener within the audience, which is obviously different from the experience of the singer within the choir. This fact in itself may need to be explained to amateur singers, as many untrained singers have little understanding of the complexities of choir acoustics and, in my experience, often fear that the audience will hear exactly what the singers hear, which is clearly not representative of the total choral effect. This can cause particular insecurity in unfamiliar room acoustics, which may be either too absorbent or too reflective to provide the choir with any kind of realistic feedback. Complicating factors include the complex perceptual interactions of bone conducted sound, room acoustics and their own position relative to the audience and the other singers. An awareness of these factors can, in itself, alleviate some concerns about their perceptions of the choral blend. Conversely, such awareness may create insecurity for some singers, due to an increased uncertainty about the aural impression received by the

audience. An awareness of acoustic effects, in terms of the differential between the choir's perception of the performance and the audience's experience of it, can also create frustrations for singers who realise that they can never hear an authentic representation of the choral sound to which they contribute.

Honest, reliable verbal feedback from the conductor can help to alleviate some of the above concerns (see Chapter 6). It is also likely that the use of accurate feedback from high quality audio recordings of rehearsals and performances may provide reassurance to the singers, regarding the overall impression of the choral performance. In practice, I have found this to be a useful confidence-building tool, as choir members have often been pleasantly surprised by the results that they hear when presented with a recording that reflects the sound from the audience's perspective. However, a cautionary note is necessary, as it is obvious that this tactic will only be successful, in terms of building confidence, when the choir has been sufficiently well prepared to produce a competent performance. This means that careful judgement is necessary regarding the timing of such recordings in relation to the musical development of the choir, particularly with newly formed ensembles. It may also be advisable to provide 'cognitive preparation' for receiving this type of audio feedback, in the same way that has been suggested for speakers suffering from social anxiety (Lundh et al., 2002). Such preparation could include priming singers to listen to their recordings as if they are listening to a performance by strangers (p. 29), in order to reduce the subjectivity of their evaluation. Future research might usefully explore the applications of digital recording technology in the context of developing choral confidence.

As previously established, the majority of earlier studies have tended to examine the effects of choir formation and spacing from the point of view of the listener or conductor (Daugherty, 1999; Lambson, 1961), rather than from the point of view of the choral singers. Little account has been taken of the potential effects of choir configuration on subjective confidence levels, as outcomes related to choral sound have been prioritised over the impact on individual affect (Daugherty, 2003; Ekholm, 2000; Ternström, 1999). This is an imbalance that needed to be addressed, as a more singer-centred approach to choral configuration can have a positive impact on the enjoyment derived from participating in an optimal choral performance. My findings indicate that considerations related to choir formation, position and spacing can also have significant effects upon individual and group efficacy. It is clear that a more competent and confident choral performance is likely to be a more enjoyable experience for the audience, and a more satisfying musical experience for the singers and conductor alike. A more inclusive consideration of these matters has therefore been worthwhile, as it is in the interests of all parties to enhance the singers' self-confidence alongside improving the quality of the performance.

7.5. COLLABORATION IN THE CHORAL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

7.5.1. Summary of Findings

- A high value is placed on cohesion, community and collaboration
- Enjoyment, satisfaction and confidence are derived from a sense of teamwork
- Listening to each other and blending with other singers are seen as part of team building
- Moral and musical support are derived from fellow choir members

- Verbal encouragement and validation from fellow singers help to facilitate and confirm the individual singers' integration into the choral community
- Trust and rapport amongst singers are important when giving and receiving feedback
- Reciprocal peer learning and role modelling amongst singers are an integral part of social learning within choral ensembles
- Amateur singers often rely upon fellow choir members for musical and expressive cues, confirmation of musical entries, reminders of notes and lyrics, and explanations of musical terminology
- Unofficial, informally recognised 'team leaders' (who often have particular skills including sight reading ability, musical knowledge, reliability of intonation, vocal clarity or strength, and/or a confident demeanour) often emerge within a choir
- The presence and reliability of these informal 'team leaders' can be a source of confidence during rehearsal and performance
- These interactions partly explain the amateur choral singers' preferences in terms of: hearing each other rather than themselves; spacing that allows physical proximity to their fellow 'team members'; choir configurations that allow singers to see as well as hear each other; and consistency of individual position within the choir
- Confidence reducing effects were linked with configurational changes that displace singers from their usual positions in relation to their unofficial 'team leaders', and with singers who do not integrate well, or who do not always contribute positively, within the choral team.

7.5.2. Teamwork and Team Leaders

The participants in this study clearly valued the sense of team spirit that they experienced within their choral ensembles, and described this as an integral part of rehearsing and performing confidently together. They also reported a dependence upon their peers for mutual support, encouragement and validation, which contributed to this sense of teamwork. Unofficial 'team leaders' were described as playing a particularly important role in the development of individual and collective efficacy. These unelected but informally acknowledged 'leaders' are often perceived as relatively stronger singers, more accomplished sight readers, more reliable in terms of timing and intonation, or more self-confident, or they may possess a combination of these attributes. Informal 'team leaders' are relied upon by the singers around them for accuracy in terms of intonation, holding the vocal line and timely musical entries. The reported importance, for these amateur singers, of hearing each other, is partly related to their reliance on neighbouring singers, especially their unofficial sectional leaders. Their reliance on particular fellow singers for musical and moral support also partly explains their preferences regarding their individual position within the choir, and the importance of consistency in this respect. The potentially complicated exercise of managing group dynamics as well as choral blend is one of the many challenges of effective choral direction.

7.5.3. Team Management

My study has demonstrated the importance of the role of social learning in the development of choral confidence. Interactions based on reciprocal peer learning, informal mentoring and role modelling, were reported as being significant components

of effective learning, and as contributory factors in the development of individual and collective self-efficacy. This gives rise to a number of recommendations.

The conductor, whose role could be interpreted as 'team manager', might capitalize upon the collaborative social learning process by maximizing the strengths of his or her team in order to build choral confidence. Taking into account the relative skills and confidence levels of individuals when positioning singers can obviously be part of this approach. In this way, the informal identification of choral team leaders or 'senior learners' can contribute to developing an environment conducive to 'human compatible learning' (HCL), as opposed to fostering 'human antagonistic learning' (Thurman and Welch, 2000). In common with the principles for developing effective communities of practice (Wenger, 2004), HCL locates learning within the interactive processes between learners, rather than prioritising the more traditional unidirectional, 'top-down' process.

The understanding of the collaborative situated learning occurring within the choral context suggests further approaches to collective choral confidence building. For example, a more egalitarian, multidirectional approach to communication and learning can be accommodated by reframing those in teaching roles as 'senior learners' rather than leaders (Thurman and Welch, 2000). This can be applied in the choral environment by situating conductors in a facilitative role, in which skills and knowledge are shared, rather than foregrounding the more traditional pre-eminent role of the conductor as the didactic figurehead of a relatively hierarchical organization.

Traditionally, our educational institutions have been largely based on the assumption that learning is an individual process and collaboration has generally been discouraged:

To assess learning we use tests with which students struggle in one-on-one combat, where knowledge must be demonstrated out of context, and where collaborating is considered cheating. (Wenger, 1998: 3)

My findings regarding choral group dynamics and teamwork suggest that effective social learning, and the enhanced confidence derived from this, can be achieved by encouraging a sense of community and collaboration in amateur choirs. These results support the proposition that, instead of mistrusting social relationships within learning situations, as traditional institutions have tended to, learning communities might incorporate them as 'essential ingredients of learning in order to maximize the engagement of its members' (Wenger 1998: 272).

The traditional approach to learning has been to attempt to structure it and, to some extent, control it, which may sometimes limit the possibilities for interactive development:

We wish to cause learning, to take charge of it, direct it, accelerate it, demand it, or even simply stop getting in the way of it. (p. 9)

The suggested approach for embracing social learning by reducing didactic pre-eminence, and opening the channels of communication so that collaborative learning can enhance confident performance, is an attractive one:

If we believe that people in organizations contribute to organizational goals by participating inventively in practices that can never be fully captured by institutionalised processes, then we will minimize prescription, suspecting that too much of it discourages the very inventiveness that makes practices effective. (p. 10)

7.5.4. Conducting a Community of Practice

In the context of the classroom, it has been stated that ‘learning cannot be designed: it can only be designed for – that is, facilitated or frustrated’ (Wenger, 1998: 229). In the choral context, it could be argued that the conductor’s role is to recognise the learning that takes place collaboratively, and to facilitate the functioning of the choir as a community of practice (CoP) by providing a rehearsal environment in which situated learning, and mutual confidence building, can be maximized. Suggestions for this include recognising and encouraging the contribution of ‘old-timers’ in the induction and training of newcomers; construing learning as participation for new members and ‘old hands’; and placing the emphasis on learning rather than teaching (Wenger, 1998). In the context of the choral ensemble this would shift the main focus away from the traditional, prescriptive role of the conductor, and promote a more inclusive approach based on the social processes of learning.

In formally organised singing activities, it has traditionally been assumed that the conductor is entirely responsible for ensuring that learning takes place to a degree that empowers choral singers to perform confidently. However, the themes arising from my data show that a significant portion of learning and confidence building also occurs as part of the social interaction that takes place between singers. There are some obvious questions arising from all of these findings. For example, should conductors actively make more use of this knowledge of the collaborative process, or should it be left to emerge organically? Would it be useful to make more explicit, formal use of the communally identified, but unofficial, ‘team leaders’ or allow these roles simply to develop naturally? How can choral singers be given the space to build,

and to benefit fully from, the community of practice that is their choir? Further research into group dynamics within amateur choral ensembles will be necessary to consider these questions more thoroughly, and to find ways of optimising social learning in amateur choirs. For the moment, I will share some initial thoughts on the facilitative role of the conductor in allowing the choral CoP to thrive.

During rehearsals it generally seems wise to limit interactions between singers in order to limit unnecessary disruptions. However, peer interactions may include sharing relevant information, informal mentoring and providing mutual encouragement as an integral part of participative learning. An awareness of this process might predispose musical leaders to allow singers to make the most of the social learning situation, by encouraging collaboration and teamwork. This takes careful judgement, patience, and a willingness to experiment with a more communal approach to learning, but it is likely to pay dividends in terms of enhanced choral relationships, task mastery and self-efficacy. Choir discipline is obviously vital but it can be balanced with opportunities for constructive peer interaction.

My findings show that amateur choral singers derive confidence from their sense of cohesion, collaborative learning, and collective achievement as a choral CoP. Consequently, there are some potentially useful practical applications of this understanding of the choir as a social learning unit. Since CoPs are connected by their understanding of the purpose and function of their joint enterprise, and achieving competence is dependent upon this understanding (Wenger, 2000: 229), mastery experiences and enhanced self-efficacy will be expedited by an understanding of the collective goals. This means that members need to have a similar and shared understanding of the aims, objectives and *modus operandi* of their CoP. If this is not

the case, clashes will occur, and the community may become fragmented and ineffective. Although the singers in a choir all contribute to the learning in their CoP, and to the development of collective confidence, part of the role of the conductor is, arguably, to try to ensure that there is understanding and agreement on the core values, goals, and function of the choir. For example, it might be necessary to establish whether the choir is principally viewed by its members and leaders as having pedagogical aims (chiefly being concerned with teaching people to sing) or as a performing group, (chiefly working towards appearing at public events), or as a combination of these two discrete categories of ensemble (Ashley, 2014). When orchestral conductors set mastery goals rather than performance goals, instrumental players experience enhanced levels of mastery and self-efficacy (Matthews and Kitsantas, 2012). Further research may usefully establish whether or not this is also the case amongst amateur choral singers, which may have possible implications for goal orientation for these performers.

7.5.5. Trust, Imagination and Alignment

Trust and rapport were viewed by many participants in this study as prerequisites for reciprocal learning, and for mutual support and validation. This relates to the fact that encouragement is only accepted if perceived as credible and trustworthy (Bandura, 1977) as well as to the need for members of CoPs to build on mutual engagement:

They interact with one another, establishing norms and relationships of *mutuality* that reflect these interactions. To be competent is to be able to engage with the community and be trusted as a partner in these interactions. (Wenger, 2000: 229)

For this reason, any activities which encourage trust, communication, rapport and interaction between members should be valued. There are three principal modes of belonging through which individuals participate in social learning processes. The first of these is engagement, which can be defined simply as joint participation:

The ways in which we engage with each other and with the world profoundly shape our experience of who we are. We learn what we can do and how the world responds to our actions. (Wenger 2000: 227)

According to my findings, this is exactly what happens in an amateur choir. Choral ensembles work together to learn songs, to make music and (usually) to perform in front of audiences. Interactions between singers are part of the learning process, and affect what and how they learn, and their perceptions of themselves and their abilities. Choral singers receive feedback, support and encouragement from peers as well as musical leaders and audiences, which informs their own assessment of their achievements, which in turn has an impact on task mastery and self-efficacy.

The second mode of belonging is imagination:

Constructing an image of ourselves, of our communities, and of the world, in order to orient ourselves, to reflect on our situation, and to explore possibilities, e.g. drawing maps, telling a story, or building a set of possible scenarios to understand one's options. (Wenger, 2000: 228)

Knowledge and perceptions involve acts of imagination, whether one is thinking about facts that are beyond personal experience or experiencing membership of a widespread community (such as the choral 'community') whose members cannot all be encountered in person. A singer's perception of him or herself as belonging to a worldwide collective of fellow singers, as well as to their local CoP, is likely to confirm their sense of identity as a singer.

Imagination can also be used to improve an individual's understanding of the context of their actions and to ensure that the third mode of belonging is achieved. This is 'alignment', which involves 'making sure that our local activities are sufficiently aligned with other processes so that they can be effective beyond our own engagement' (Wenger, 2000: 228). For a choir, practical applications of this include choosing and rehearsing appropriate repertoire which can be performed in public to an appreciative but discerning audience. For a choral singer, imagining, in some detail, the performance situation while in rehearsal can be good preparation for the public event, and may reduce some of the anxieties produced by the change in situation and environment when moving from rehearsal room to concert venue. This can include picturing aspects such as the layout and acoustics of the venue; visualising the audience and their response; preparing for the formality of the occasion compared with the rehearsal environment; imagining wearing choir uniform; and adopting their performance posture and 'persona.' Preparation can then extend to altering the layout of the choir in rehearsal to reflect any limitations of the performance venue, rehearsing stage entries and exits, and possibly holding 'dress rehearsals' in choir uniform for acclimatisation.

7.5.6. Team Building Activities

The modes of belonging in a CoP can be developed in tandem, by 'balancing the limitations of one with the work of another' (Wenger, 2000: 229). For instance, the possible narrowness of engagement in a particular CoP can be counteracted by reflective approaches that activate the imagination or 'boundary interactions' necessitating alignment with other related, but different CoPs around some kind of

shared goal (Wenger, 1998). In practical terms, examples of boundary interactions for choral singers can include workshops with other choir leaders; exchange visits with other choral ensembles; working with different conductors; participating in music festivals and massed choir performances; joining with other choirs for combined projects; engaging in social activities with other singers. All of these opportunities to extend musical and social horizons result in social learning, which can add to the singer's knowledge and experience, enhance task mastery, and reinforce the individual's view of him or herself as a competent choral singer. A significant by-product of this is likely to be increased self-efficacy for choral singing for individual members, and an enhanced sense of group efficacy for the choir as a whole.

When assessing the choir as an effective CoP, and planning a strategy for collective confidence building based on cohesion and collaboration, a useful diagnostic question might be 'Does the choir have the main elements of community design in place?' The following checklist is based on Wenger's (2000) principle components for the design of healthy CoPs, and includes suggestions for implementation within the choral context:

- **Events** can bring the community together and foster a sense of identity. For a choir, these will obviously include performances, but social events also play a useful part in cohesion and identity formation, and can be helpful in developing a sense of belonging.
- **Internal leadership** is vital, and 'enabling the leaders to play their role is a way to help the community to develop' (Wenger, 2000: 231). Different forms of leadership might be required in different areas, such as networking, planning and development, and may be shared by various members. In a choral ensemble, the obvious leader is the

conductor, often alongside administrative leaders who may or may not hold formal committee positions, depending upon the organizational structure of the choir. However, singers often take on other practical and educational roles, including acting as role models, informal mentoring, and induction of new members. Part of the conductor's contribution to the choir as a CoP is to foster the development of these informal leadership roles, and to incorporate them into the structure and functioning of the choir as a whole.

- **Connectivity** can include 'brokering relationships' between people who can help each other. This could also be part of the role of the conductor, and could include identifying and fostering potentially mutually beneficial mentoring and peer learning relationships, in order to build collective and individual confidence as part of a collaborative CoP.
- **Membership** can be healthily maintained by enabling novices to become full members. Questions related to this might include: Does the choir have some form of induction process to accommodate new arrivals? Would some kind of befriending system benefit both 'old timers' and 'apprentices'? These considerations are likely to contribute to enhanced confidence as individuals are successfully integrated into the choir.
- **Artefacts**, such as documents, equipment, stories etc. are part of a CoP. For a choir these could include uniform, folders, sheet music, concert programmes, logos, photographs, recordings and websites. Choral communities may need to reflect on which artefacts are necessary for their growth and development, and who will be responsible for their creation and maintenance. Useful questions to consider include: Does the choir need a librarian, a uniform sub-committee, a publicity manager, a website designer? Do these roles add to the efficiency of the choir, and the collective identity of the group? Does performing these roles add to the members' sense of

belonging and personal investment in the community and its activities? All of these are important considerations, as a sense of belonging, teamwork and community was found to increase confidence amongst participants in my study.

- **Learning projects** can help CoPs to ‘deepen their mutual commitment’ by taking ‘responsibility for a learning agenda’ (Wenger, 2000: 231). For a choir, this could include taking part in workshops; working with other choirs and conductors; learning new repertoire; trying new styles of music or types of performance; watching choral performances together; taking part in exchange visits with other choirs; participating in music festivals or ‘scratch’ performances; organizing choir tours. All of these kinds of projects are likely to enhance the collective sense of task mastery, reinforce the singers’ identity as choral performers, and therefore increase individual and collective self-efficacy.

7.5.7. Conclusions and Caveats

In conclusion, choral confidence, both individually and collectively, is partly derived from the singers’ sense of cohesion and community. For amateur singers, confidence can be built upon collaborative interactions, including modelling, informal mentoring and peer learning. Many participants in this study viewed the choir as a ‘team’ and derived confidence from trusting and relying upon their team members. As the ‘team manager’, the conductor can enhance this sense of teamwork, by considering matters related to cohesion and confidence when positioning the choir; by adopting a facilitative role as a senior learner; and by allowing constructive singer to singer interaction within rehearsals. Recognizing the informal peer modelling and mentoring

that happens in situated learning, and allowing space for collaboration, are important steps towards creating an effective choral CoP.

A caveat to all of the above should, however, be included. Whilst the community of practice is a useful framework for examining group dynamics in amateur choirs, and suggests potential strategies for contributing towards choral confidence, it should not be assumed that CoPs always develop in a positive way:

Communities of practice cannot be romanticized. They are born of learning, but they can also learn not to learn. They are the cradles of the human spirit, but they can also be its cages. After all, witch-hunts were also community practices. (Wenger, 2000: 230)

Attempting to provide optimal conditions for the emergence of an effective CoP can be a useful part of the conductor's role when building a choir, and particularly when considering group efficacy. However, peer to peer interactions may sometimes have negative effects on individual and collective confidence (see Chapter 5), and are not always within the control of the conductor. Indeed, these more negative relationships may not even be apparent to the musical director of a very large choir. Further research might include exploring these aspects of singer to singer interaction and their effects on confidence levels, with a view to providing recommendations for choral directors dealing with these complex social learning and performance situations.

7.6. VERBAL COMMUNICATION

7.6.1. Summary of Findings

- There was a widespread acknowledgement of the impact of the amount, content, credibility and style of delivery of verbal feedback
- Positive feedback was seen as encouraging, motivational and confidence building
- A preference was expressed for a high rate of verbal feedback
- A lack of verbal feedback was seen as having an adverse effect on confidence
- Verbal feedback was only effective if perceived as credible and trustworthy
- A high value was placed on verbal feedback from trusted fellow choir members
- A premium was placed on verbal feedback from respected musical experts
- A particularly high level of influence was accorded to verbal feedback from choral conductors
- There was a strong adverse reaction to singling out individuals for criticism
- There was a strong preference for constructive criticism balanced with realistic, credible praise
- Mutual rapport and respect were seen as essential components for the delivery and acceptance of verbal feedback
- There was a stated need for communication from musical leaders to take into account the age and ability of adult amateur choral singers
- There was a consensus that destructive criticism is ineffective in terms of its impact on performance and confidence

7.6.2. Verbal Feedback and Amateur Singers

My findings indicate that adult amateur choral singers derive confidence from a realistic balance of believable praise and constructive criticism, which provides specific, performance-related information. Self-efficacy is significantly enhanced by feedback when it is received from a trusted fellow singer, and feedback has a particularly profound effect when delivered by a perceived musical expert, such as a conductor. Destructive criticism, a low incidence of praise, and, conversely, over-effusive or unrealistic praise were all reported as having adverse effects on confidence. Therefore, for these participants, the source and style of delivery of the feedback, as well as the amount and content, had a significant impact on confidence levels in rehearsal and performance. This contrasts with the view that ‘almost any feedback can be enjoyable, provided it is logically related to a goal in which one has invested psychic energy’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002: 57).

Successfully achieving performance goals can provide its own, intrinsic feedback, and the immediate feedback that university level musicians receive from the sound of the music they are performing can be sufficient to contribute towards a state of flow and a reduction in performance anxiety (Kirchner et al., 2008). However, for the amateur participants in my study, it seems that the intrinsic, immediate feedback derived from the performance itself is not sufficient to build their confidence, and that they are more reliant upon external sources of praise and constructive criticism, particularly from trusted peers and respected musical leaders.

The majority of previous research into feedback in musical settings has concentrated on performance classes and choirs in schools and universities

(Biddlecombe, 2012; Byo, 1994; Duke, 1998; Duke and Henninger, 1998; Yarbrough and Madsen, 1998), and there has been little research into any age-related difference in feedback requirements that should be taken into account when working with adult learners in choirs. In other domains of adult learning, the interpersonal qualities and teaching style of group leaders are often more significant than the lesson content (Duay and Bryan, 2008; Hickson and Housley, 1997; Villar et al., 2010), and it seems that this may be applicable to amateur choirs. It is not possible to generalise, however, as not all older learners have the same needs (Findsen, 2005) and, indeed, people become increasingly diverse as life experience is accrued (Withnall, 2010). It has accordingly been suggested that leaders of musical activities with groups of adult amateurs need to develop a range of teaching strategies and organisational approaches in order to accommodate the diversity of needs, experience and attitudes to learning which are found amongst older people (Creech et al., 2013). This has proven to be particularly relevant to the amateur singers in the current study, and is reflective of the age group into which the majority of the participants fall.

The main focus of this discussion regarding the effect of verbal communication on choral self-efficacy can largely be summarised in terms of the appropriateness of the content and style of feedback for adult amateur singers. Some of the principles of teaching adults in other contexts are applicable here, including taking into account the experience, knowledge and insight of adult learners, and adopting a more collaborative, facilitative approach to suit the composition of the group (Creech et al., 2013). This can require flexibility on the part of group leaders (Withnall, 2010), and a willingness to adapt their preferred approach and teaching or leadership style (Cox, 1989) in order to cater for the varied needs of adult learners. It should be recognised

that not all amateur musical ensembles are comparable, as the membership of such groups is often very diverse, and individuals have varying attitudes and approaches to feedback.

Providing appropriate, effective feedback, setting challenging but achievable goals, and allowing adequate preparation are all necessary conditions for accessing the confidence-enhancing benefits of optimal performance or flow:

There must be skill in a symbolic domain; there have to be rules, a goal, and a way of obtaining feedback. One must be able to concentrate and interact with the opportunities at a level commensurate with one's skills. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002: 118)

The findings of the current study suggest that, when providing verbal feedback and setting musical targets, choral directors may need to take more account of the confidence and skill levels of adult amateur singers, alongside the collective musical goals of the choir as a whole. In some cases, depending upon the ability and efficacy of the choir, these considerations may need to take priority over the conductor's own personal and musical aspirations.

7.6.3. Communication and Community

For the conductor, remembering to take into account the level of knowledge and musical training of the choral singer may contribute to the formation of a confidence-building sense of community. When working with some amateur ensembles, this may mean resisting the temptation to display the conductor's own familiarity with more advanced technical and musical terminology, or furnishing a brief explanation of some of the less common terms. Some participants indicated that the overuse of jargon can create unnecessary mystique and form an impenetrable barrier for some singers. It can

create a division between the conductor and the choir, and between singers with different levels of musical knowledge, reducing cohesion and having a negative impact on the singers' sense of the choir as a team. This has been identified as a problem amongst teachers and educational writers, and the motivation for this may relate to egotistical needs rather than to the needs of the learners:

Certain books seem to have been written, not in order to afford us any instruction, but merely for the purpose of letting us know that their authors knew something. (Goethe, cited by Spender, 1958: 272).

The concept of prioritising the needs of the singers, in order to enable effective learning and mastery experiences, relates to other subordinate themes raised by the participants. These included accounting for choir members' confidence levels as well as musical and vocal ability; not over-pressurising singers with unrealistic or over-ambitious performance goals; considering the suitability of repertoire and performance situations for the choir as well as the personal and musical aspirations of the conductor; considering their need to hear (and, if possible, see) each other; allowing for adequate preparation, including 'note bashing' and physical aspects of presentation; organising rehearsals at the venue or in 'concert formation' in order to reduce distractions and facilitate immersion in the music and performance; and providing feedback appropriate to the singers' age, experience, vocal skills and level of musical knowledge.

Singling out singers or small sections of the choir for criticism was widely seen as having a particularly damaging effect on performance and confidence. Some participants felt that this approach to giving feedback could be divisive, reducing the sense of the choir as a collective entity. It was felt that a confidence-enhancing sense of teamwork and community spirit was more likely to evolve if individuals were not

singled out for comment. A sense of patience while everyone learns, without feeling threatened by humiliation, victimisation or other forms of destructive criticism, is likely to foster a positive, cohesive rehearsal environment, in which skills and self-efficacy can develop in tandem.

The above goals may partly be attained by developing a view of the role of the conductor or teacher as a co-ordinator, facilitator and 'senior learner' (Thurman and Welch, 2000) who contributes to the collective learning process, rather than as a leader who is solely responsible for group learning. This approach entails valuing other 'senior learners' within the choir and incorporating their contribution into the learning process, which can facilitate the functioning of the choir as an effective community of practice.

7.6.4. Group Feedback and Self-efficacy

Responses to feedback, and preferences regarding praise and criticism, may depend upon individual differences, such as the self-efficacy baseline of the recipients (Bandura and Cervone, 1986; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Swann et al., 1988), as well as the age and experience of the participants, and upon the voluntary or obligatory nature of the task (Van-Dijk and Kluger, 2000, 2001, cited in Hattie and Timperley, 2007). For adult amateur choral ensembles, it may be necessary to take into account the needs of the individual as well as the group, viewing feedback from the perspective of the members, and trying to target it at the appropriate level for the recipients. This involves considering the content, amount, style of delivery and balance between positive and negative feedback, alongside the needs of amateur singers for both musical attainment and confidence building.

The content and style of feedback may need to be adjusted to accommodate different goals (Madsen and Duke, 1985). Confidence building feedback might, arguably, differ from pure performance feedback, although feedback that improves performance quality and the singers' sense of task mastery is also likely to increase self-efficacy. It should also be acknowledged that a complicating factor in the context of the current study is that group feedback, of the kind that a choral ensemble may receive, can be 'confounded by perceptions of relevance to oneself or to other group members' (Hattie and Timperley, 2007: 93), as learners may perceive the feedback as relevant to him or herself, to the group as a whole, or other members of the group rather than to him or herself. This may obviously reduce the effectiveness of the feedback in the latter instances (Nadler, 1979). This would be a potentially useful area for further research, in order to clarify the effects on confidence of group feedback in choral rehearsals.

7.7. OVERVIEW OF INTERACTIVE EMERGENT THEMES

This research has established that there are a wide range of interacting factors which can contribute to confident choral performance (see Appendix 1: Diagram 1).

One of the most significant outcomes of this study, in terms of contrast with earlier research, relates to choir configuration. This is associated with the amateur singers' need to see each other for positive reinforcement via non-verbal communication (NVC), and to hear each other for musical and moral support. These factors, in turn, relate to the interactions within the amateur choir (see Appendix 1: Diagram 2). These interactions include mutual encouragement and validation; reciprocal peer learning; informal mentoring and role modelling; and affective interdependence (see Appendix

1: Diagram 3). The reported emergence of, and reliance upon, unelected but informally acknowledged 'team leaders' is of particular importance in this respect, and they make a significant contribution to the collective learning process.

My findings have shown that reciprocal non-verbal and verbal communication between choral singers has a more significant effect upon learning and confidence levels than might be expected from the usual view of the choir as based on the conductor-singer dyad. The complexity of relationships within the choir is many-layered and multidimensional, with large elements of collaborative social learning in addition to the input of the conductor.

My interpretation of amateur choirs as CoPs, in which the development of individual and collective confidence are supported by group processes, has strong links to the established strategies for changing perceptions of self efficacy, namely direct personal experience, modelling by others, and verbal encouragement, particularly from people who are perceived as credible, knowledgeable and trustworthy (Bandura, 1977). My findings have illustrated that, in an amateur choir, all three of these approaches to improving perceived self-efficacy are accessed by singers. During their induction into a choral ensemble, newcomers gain practical experience, whilst learning from their observation of peer role models. They also value, and learn from, verbal encouragement from other singers, especially when a sense of trust and rapport has developed, as well as from the conductor.

These collective processes have also been described in terms of situated learning, which applies the principals of apprenticeship and mastery in educational settings (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This approach foregrounds peer modelling and

informal mentoring, rather than focusing upon teacher-led verbal instruction. The concept of situated learning in collaborative communities of practice provides a 'social definition of learning in terms of *social competence* and *personal experience*' (Wenger 2000) and has clear links with the social and personal processes described as influencing perceived self-efficacy (Bandura 1977).

Bearing all of the above in mind, the community of practice is therefore a useful model for interpreting the reciprocal interactions that take place within a choir (see Appendix 1: Diagram 3), and places the conductor in a facilitative role rather than a purely didactic, leadership position. From this facilitative position, the conductor's contribution to effective learning and choral confidence can be substantial (see Appendix 1: Diagram 4).

Conductors may find it useful to encourage singers to exchange positive verbal and non-verbal feedback in order to maximise the effectiveness of the choir as a collaborative community of practice and to promote beneficial emotional contagion. Leading by example, in terms of modelling positive body language may mean that the conductor can act as a catalyst for a chain reaction of physical mirroring and emotional contagion (see Appendix 1: Diagram 5). For this reason, it should be ascertained that singers can see and hear each other as well as the conductor, so that positive reinforcement can be shared within the choral community. Group flow, with its benefits of reduced self-consciousness and increased confidence, may also be facilitated by using configurations which allow singers to see each other so that they can 'catch' flow sensations (Bakker, 2005).

The findings regarding the superordinate theme of feedback interact with the other emergent themes in this study, and this suggests an integrated approach to

enhancing choral confidence. Although collective processes within the choir have emerged as having an important role in social learning and confidence building, there are many ways in which the conductor can help to facilitate collaborative learning and contribute to collective efficacy. When providing feedback, the conductor can enhance his or her own credibility by giving realistic, specific praise and constructive criticism (Biddlecombe, 2012; Kanouse et al., 1981), so that the feedback is seen as trustworthy and reliable. Providing specific, performance-related feedback focuses the singer's attention on the task of performing, thereby improving performance quality, increasing mastery experiences and reducing self-consciousness. Meaningful, task-focused feedback is therefore likely to contribute to the facilitation of confidence-enhancing flow conditions (see Appendix 1: Diagram 6).

7.7. THE APPLICATION OF HUMAN COMPATIBLE LEARNING AND FLOW THEORIES IN THE CHORAL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

In view of the findings of this research, human compatible learning theory (Thurman and Welch, 2000) provides a potentially transformational framework for building confidence in amateur choirs, and fulfils many of the needs identified by the participants in my research. On some occasions, rather than exemplifying the principles of human compatible learning (HCL), 'human antagonistic' behaviour had reportedly been modelled by some of their conductors. This included destructive criticism; making an example of individuals or vocal sections; using negative or inappropriate language; not delivering feedback in a respectful, age-appropriate manner; creating an imbalance of praise and criticism by favouring either negative feedback or unrealistic, over-inflated praise which eventually became meaningless.

Confidence is clearly more likely to be developed if the principles of HCL are applied to choral conducting and teaching.

The application of HCL principles in the adult amateur choral environment would include providing encouragement and optimal support for learning; allowing singers to learn collaboratively from each other as well as from the conductor; using non-judgmental and non-threatening language to make improvements to performance; and providing rehearsal environments in which mutual respect, empathy and 'pleasant feeling states' can be generated, as these have a positive influence on aspects of learning such as attention and memory (Thurman and Welch, 2000: 216).

If the rehearsal situation is not conducive to optimal experiences there will be a consequent reduction in task mastery experiences and perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Equally, flow, as a source of confidence, cannot be experienced if there are too many distractions from the task (Csikszentmihalyi, 2007). For some participants, musical and practical preparation was reported as not being adequate to allow them to develop the skill levels required to experience total absorption in the music and enjoyment of the performance. This may be the case if too little time has been spent on learning the words or music, or if the style, content or delivery of feedback has not been helpful. Situational distractions relating to acoustics, venues and choir configuration (especially if there are very limited opportunities to acclimatise to performance venues) also sometimes mean that amateur choral activities are not entirely autotelic or optimal experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 2007).

Participants in the current study reported that amateur choral ensembles may sometimes become excessively goal or performance oriented. This may be due to the personal approach or personality of the conductor; the possible prioritisation of his or

her own musical targets over the emotional, psychological and vocal well-being of the choir; and/or the prevalent culture of the choir. When this happens, enjoyment is often diminished, absorption in the music is reduced, and confidence suffers. Again, this impedes flow, as one of the prerequisites of optimal performance is to match skill levels to appropriate challenges (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002: 118). The complex neuropsychobiological needs of the singer (Thurman and Welch, 2000) therefore need to be taken into account, as well as the achievement goals of the conductor.

Flow results in a feeling of being part of a larger entity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2007) and it also seems to be true that feeling part of a larger entity facilitates confidence-inducing flow. Participants in the current study consistently reported deriving confidence from their sense of the choir as a community or team. Encouraging propitious conditions for the development of the peer learning and social cohesion that comprise the choral CoP may therefore help to encourage flow, and to build confidence. Although group interactions emerged as a significant superordinate theme in this study, it is also clear that it is partly the responsibility of the conductor to contribute to an environment in which flow states are attainable. Creating favourable conditions for flow and optimal learning includes encouraging collaborative and cohesive relationships; providing carefully balanced constructive criticism and specific positive feedback; setting clear, demanding but achievable shared goals; allowing adequate preparation of the musical and practical elements of presenting a confident performance; and modelling confident body language, posture and deportment.

Based on the findings of the current study, it appears that the conductor's contribution to achieving group flow partly consists of ensuring that extraneous distractions are reduced so that concentration on the performance (being 'in the

moment') can be as complete as possible. This includes dealing with acoustic issues; considering the impact of choir formation, spacing and position; getting used to, and preparing for, the idiosyncrasies of venues; providing opportunities for singers to become accustomed to different layouts and positions; making sure they can hear each other adequately for immediate musical feedback and musical cues; allowing singers to be in a position to monitor facial feedback from each other and the conductor for moral support and encouragement; taking account of individual needs including interpersonal relationships, relative skill and confidence levels when positioning singers; and facilitating a mutually supportive, cohesive and collaborative learning environment.

Modelling flow states is also a possible strategy for conductors to help their choirs to achieve their own flow experiences, as emotional contagion can play a role in the transfer of flow between music teachers to their students (Bakker, 2005) and, equally, between conductors and singers. Conductors might also profitably explain the concept of flow to singers, so that 'they may then explore for themselves times of optimal experience and become more mindful of when flow occurs and in which kind of situations' (Wesson and Boniwell, 2007: 39). It is not possible, however, to induce flow states at will; one can only aim to provide propitious conditions for flow to occur (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). There are also complicating factors, including the fact that (due to excessive self-absorption or self-consciousness, attentional disorders or stimulus over-inclusion) 'some individuals might be constitutionally incapable of experiencing flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002: 84).

The above restrictions and individual differences mean that creating a personal flow state and/or facilitating group flow will not always be achievable goals for the

choral director. Furthermore, the attainment of these goals cannot be viewed as the conductor's sole responsibility, especially bearing in mind the functioning of the choir as a CoP with opportunities for peer learning, modelling and collaboration, and the potential effects of negative, as well as positive, emotional contagion between singers. However, the conductor's adoption of a personal and professional approach which is likely to stimulate flow conditions, alongside the provision of a rehearsal environment which is conducive to human compatible learning, collaborative interaction and optimal experience, will contribute to the development of individual and collective confidence within the choral community of practice.

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APPENDIX 1: DIAGRAMS

Diagram 1: Influences on Choral Confidence

Diagram 2: Configuration, Collaboration and Confidence

Diagram 3: Reciprocal Processes within the Choral Community of Practice

Diagram 4: The Conductor's Contribution

Diagram 5: Catalytic Conductors and Emotional Contagion

Diagram 6: Feedback and Flow

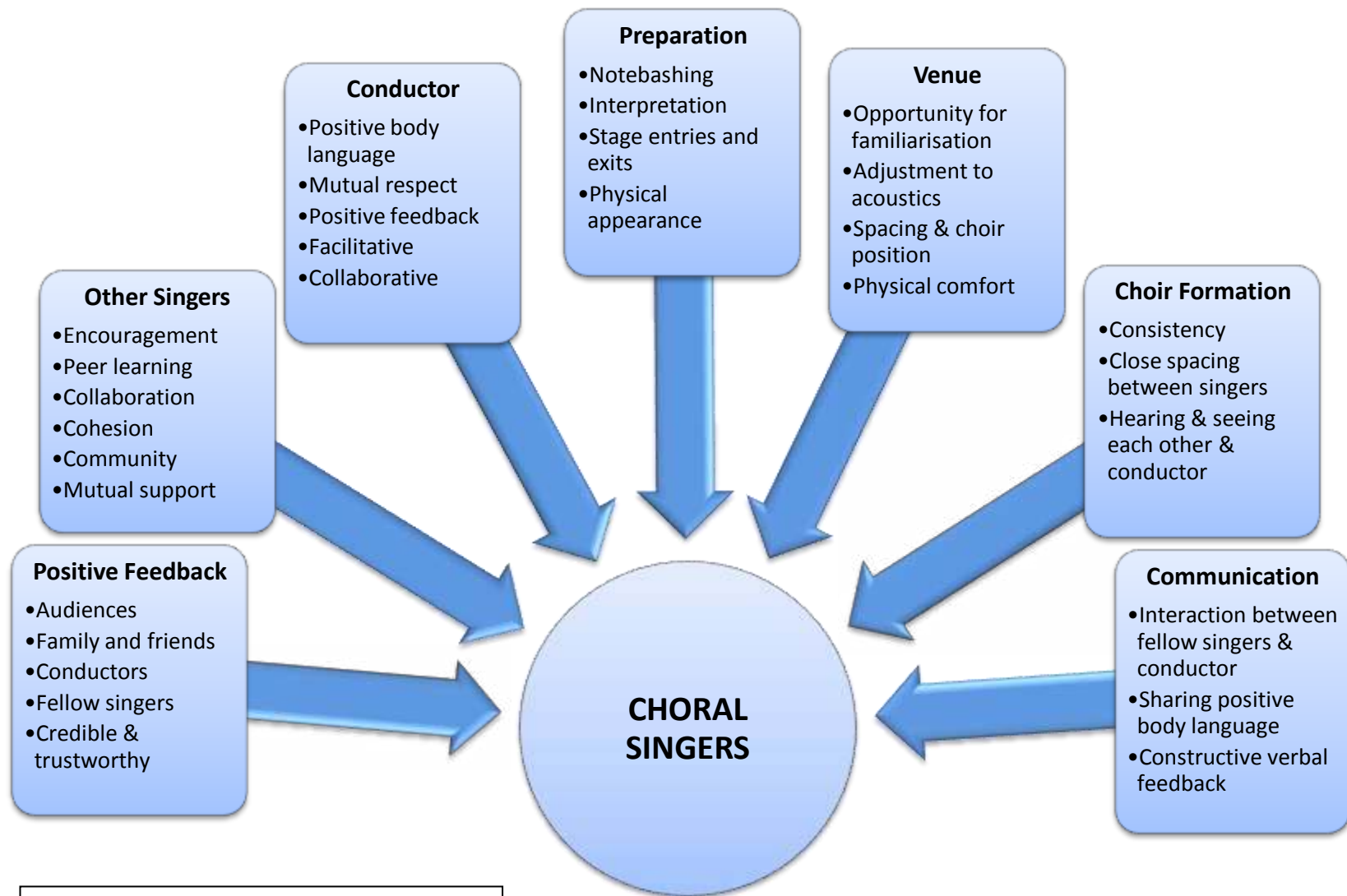


Diagram 1. Influences on choral confidence

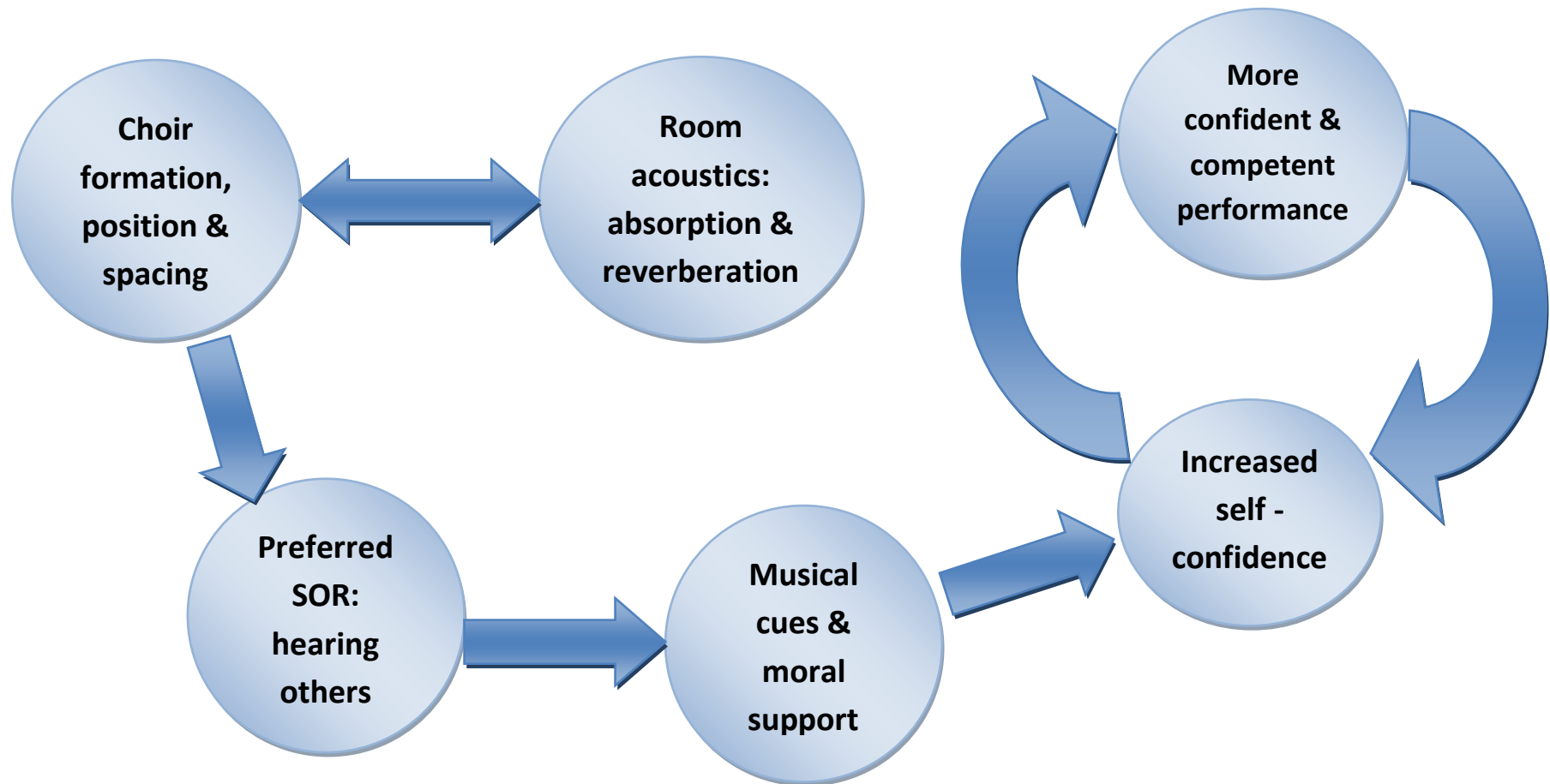


Diagram 2. Configuration, collaboration & confidence

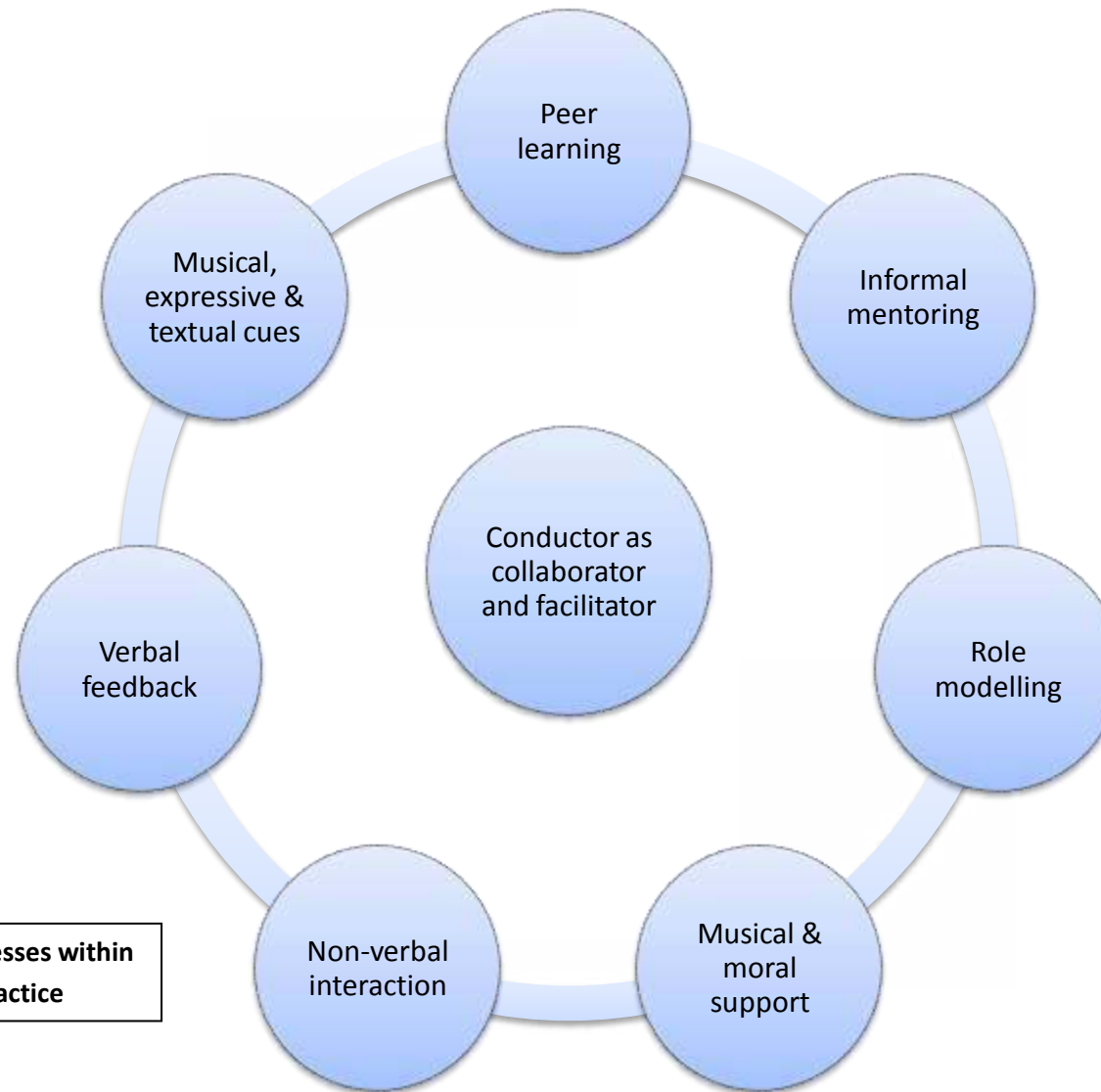


Diagram 3: Reciprocal processes within the choral community of practice

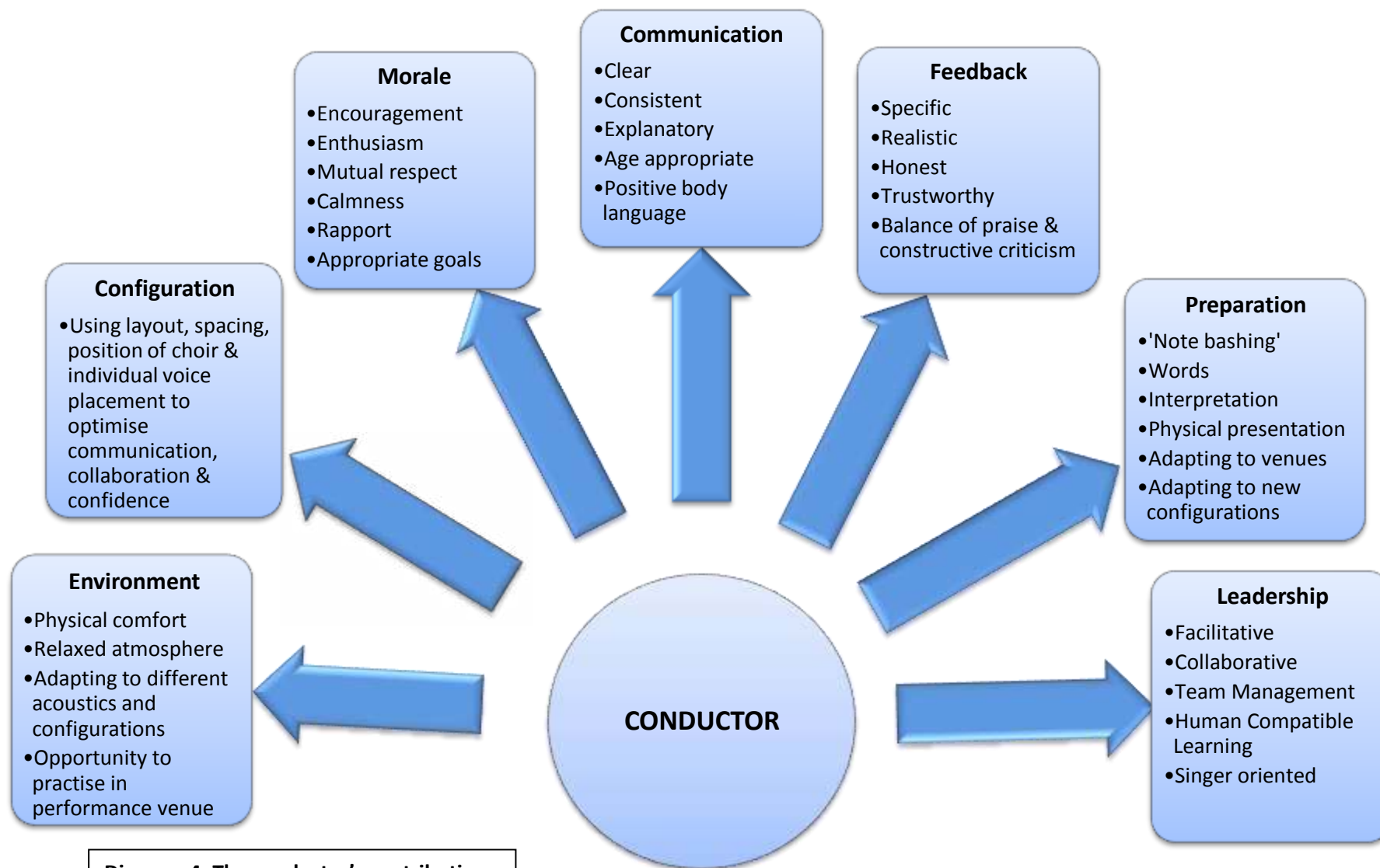
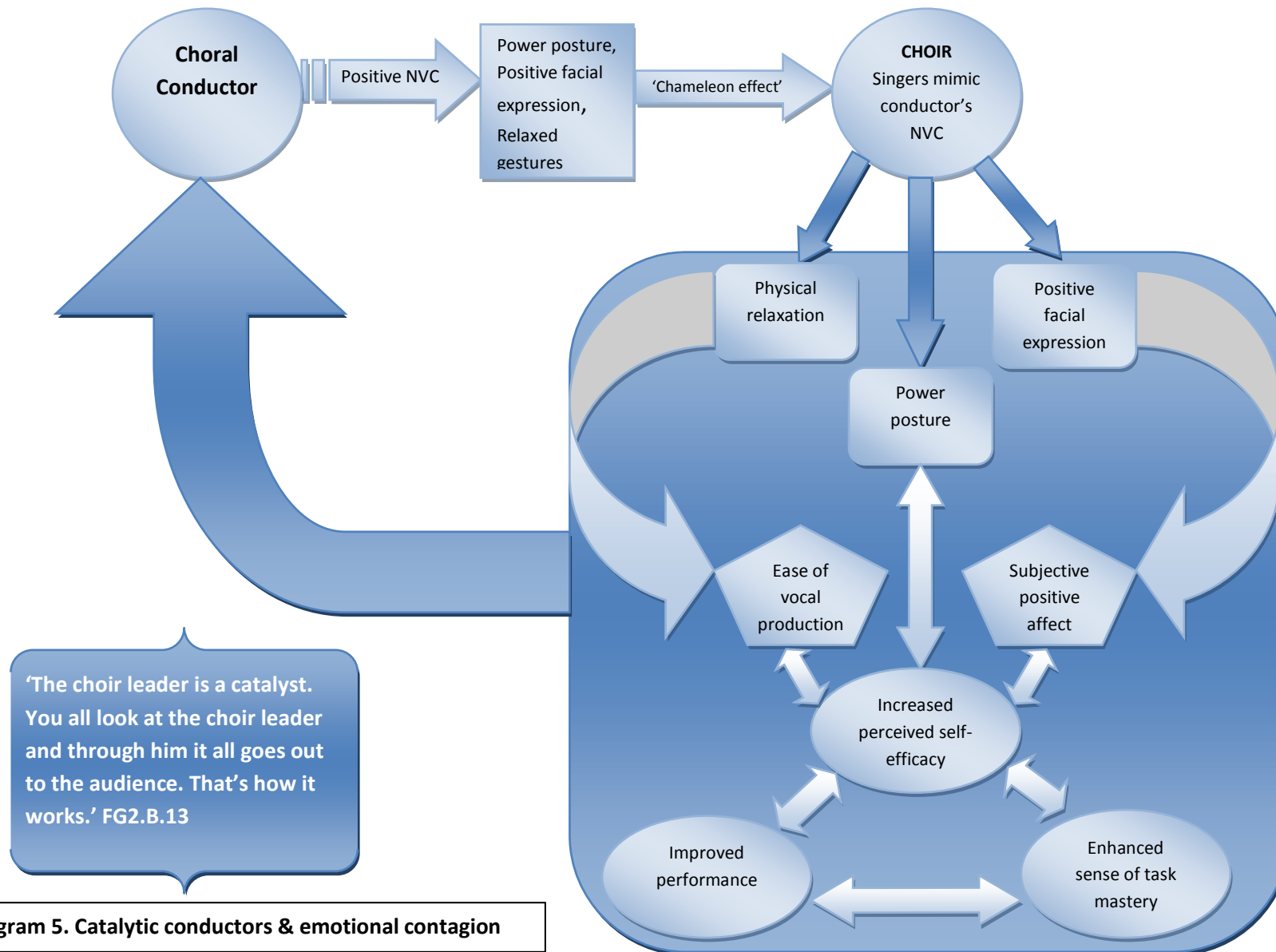
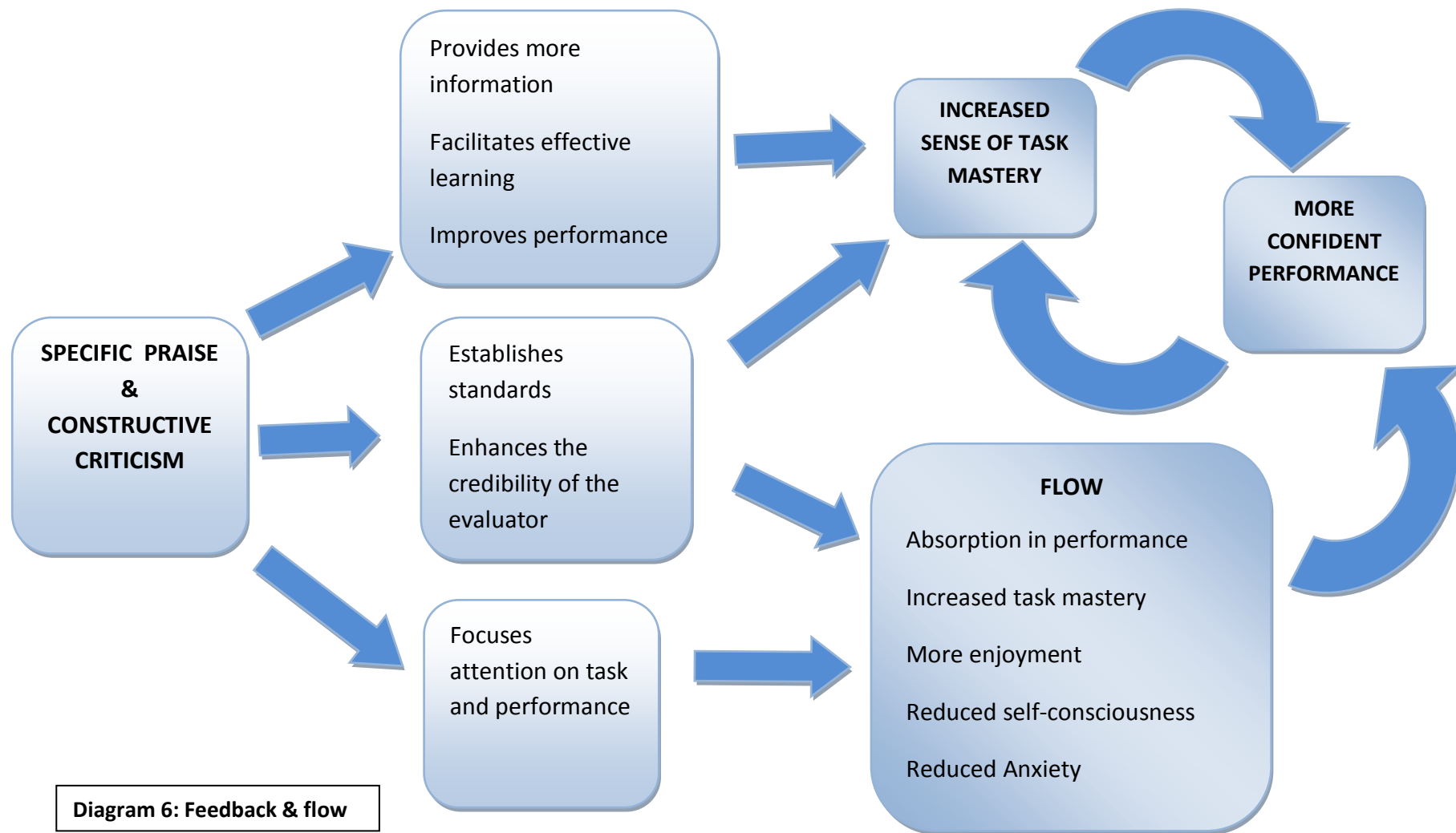


Diagram 4. The conductor's contribution





APPENDIX 2: Information sheet for focus groups

CONFIDENCE AND THE ADULT SINGER: AN EXPLORATION OF THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF DIFFERING CONFIDENCE LEVELS AMONGST AMATEUR SINGERS

You are being invited to take part in the above research project. Before you decide whether or not you wish to participate in this, it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out, and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and do ask me if there is anything that you would like me to clarify or explain.

This research project is designed to explore some of the factors that might affect how we feel when we sing in various different situations, and some of the reasons why we might have different feelings about our singing.

You have been chosen to participate in this part of the project as I am interviewing adult singers who participate in amateur performances, and who have differing levels of training and experience.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you decide that you would prefer not to participate, or if you decide to withdraw at any stage, there will be no negative consequences.

This research is part of a longer term study, in which each of you will be asked to participate in one or two interviews. Each session is likely to last approximately two hours. These interviews may be followed up (with your permission) with some brief enquiries by email.

Initially you will be involved in a group interview, which may be followed up by an individual interview, if you are willing to do this. All interviews will be recorded. In the group interviews it is hoped that there will be 6 to 8 participants.

All of the information collected from you and about you during the course of this research will be strictly confidential. The results of this research are likely to be published and the data may be used for subsequent research. However, all data collected will be anonymized using a coding system so that you will not be identifiable in any reports or publications. Any personal information, such as names and contact details, will be separated from the interview transcripts and stored separately. This information and all recordings will be disposed of securely after the study is completed.

Whilst there may be no immediate benefits for those who choose to take part in this research, it is hoped that this work will provide results and recommendations that are useful in the training of singers, voice teachers and choral directors.

The principal researcher, Michael Bonshor, is a member of the Music Department at Sheffield University, and he is happy to answer any questions that you may have about the research process in which you will be involved. Michael can be contacted by email for any queries or concerns that may arise relating to this research: pocketmaestro@hotmail.com. The

supervisor for this project is Dr Stephanie Pitts, who can be contacted by email: s.e.pitts@sheffield.ac.uk , should you have any concerns that are not dealt with satisfactorily by the principal researcher. This research project has been ethically approved via the University ethics review procedure.

If you do decide to take part in this research, please sign and date the attached consent form and return it to Michael Bonshor for safekeeping. Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for considering participating in this part of the project.

1st January 2012

APPENDIX 3: Information sheet for interviewees

CONFIDENCE AND THE ADULT SINGER: AN EXPLORATION OF THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF DIFFERING CONFIDENCE LEVELS AMONGST AMATEUR SINGERS

You are being invited to take part in the above research project. Before you decide whether or not you wish to participate in this, it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out, and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and do ask me if there is anything that you would like me to clarify or explain.

This research project is designed to explore some of the factors that might affect how we feel when we sing in various different situations, and some of the reasons why we might have different feelings about our singing.

You have been chosen to participate in this part of the project as I am interviewing adult amateur singers who have differing levels of training and experience.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you decide that you would prefer not to participate, or if you decide to withdraw at any stage, there will be no negative consequences.

This research is part of a longer term study, in which each of you will be asked to participate in one or two interviews. Each session is likely to last approximately two hours and will be recorded. These interviews may be followed up (with your permission) with some brief enquiries by email.

All of the information collected from you and about you during the course of this research will be strictly confidential. The results of this research are likely to be published and the data may be used for subsequent research. However, all data collected will be anonymized using a coding system so that you will not be identifiable in any reports or publications. Any personal information, such as names and contact details, will be separated from the interview transcripts and stored separately. This information and all recordings will be disposed of securely after the study is completed.

Whilst there may be no immediate benefits for those who choose to take part in this research, it is hoped that this work will provide results and recommendations that are useful in the training of singers, voice teachers and choral directors.

The principal researcher, Michael Bonshor, is a member of the Music Department at Sheffield University, and he is happy to answer any questions that you may have about the research process in which you will be involved. Michael can be contacted by email for any queries or concerns that may arise relating to this research: pocketmaestro@hotmail.com. The supervisor for this project is Dr Stephanie Pitts, who can be contacted by email: s.e.pitts@sheffield.ac.uk, should you have any concerns that are not dealt with satisfactorily by the principal researcher. This research project has been ethically approved via the University ethics review procedure.

If you do decide to take part in this research, please sign and date the attached consent form and return it to Michael Bonshor for safekeeping. Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for considering participating in this part of the project.

1st January 2012

APPENDIX 4: Focus group consent form

CONFIDENCE AND THE ADULT SINGER: AN EXPLORATION OF THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF DIFFERING CONFIDENCE LEVELS AMONGST AMATEUR SINGERS

Principal Researcher: Michael Bonshor

Email: pocketmaestro@hotmail.com

Please initial the following statements:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated 1st January 2012, which explains the above research project. ☐
- I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions I have about the project. ☐
- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, and without any negative consequences. ☐
- I also understand that, should I prefer not to answer any particular question(s), I am free to decline. ☐
- I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential and that a coding system will be used to protect my anonymity. I also understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in any reports that result from the research. ☐
- I am willing for the focus group to be recorded. I understand that the recording will be accessed only by the researcher, and stored and disposed of securely. ☐
- I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research. ☐
- I agree to take part in this research project. ☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

APPENDIX 5: Interview consent form

CONFIDENCE AND THE ADULT SINGER: AN EXPLORATION OF THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF DIFFERING CONFIDENCE LEVELS AMONGST AMATEUR SINGERS

Principal Researcher: Michael Bonshor

Email: pocketmaestro@hotmail.com

Please initial the following statements:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated 1st January 2012, which explains the above research project. ☐
- I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions I have about the project. ☐
- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, and without any negative consequences. ☐
- I also understand that, should I prefer not to answer any particular question(s), I am free to decline. ☐
- I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential and that a coding system will be used to protect my anonymity. I also understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in any reports that result from the research. ☐
- I am willing for the interview to be recorded. I understand that the recording will be accessed only by the researcher, and stored and disposed of securely. ☐
- I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research. ☐
- I agree to take part in this research project. ☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

APPENDIX 6: Focus group background information form

The following information will be useful for compiling information about the composition of this group, and to provide contact details, which will be used only for a brief follow up, if necessary.

This information will be stored separately from any other research data, such as interview transcriptions, and will be destroyed once the research project is complete. This will ensure that your confidentiality and anonymity are safe guarded.

Contact details will only be accessed by the principal researcher. Please tick relevant box to indicate your willingness for contact to be made if a brief follow up is required.

Name:

Gender: Occupation:

Age: 20-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ 51-60 ☐ 61-70 ☐ 70+ ☐

Musical Education:

.....

Singing experience:

.....

Any other hobbies:

Email Address:

Please tick box if you are happy to be contacted for a brief follow-up ☐

APPENDIX 7: Interviewee background information form

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION – SINGERS - INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

The following information will be useful for compiling information about the composition of this group, and to provide contact details, which will be used only for a brief follow up, if necessary.

This information will be stored separately from any other research data, such as interview transcriptions, and will be destroyed once the research project is complete. This will ensure that your confidentiality and anonymity are safe guarded.

Contact details will only be accessed by the principal researcher. Please tick relevant box to indicate your willingness for contact to be made if a brief follow up is required.

Name: _____

Gender: _____ Occupation: _____

Age: 20-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ 51-60 ☐ 61-70 ☐ 70+ ☐

Musical Education: _____

Singing experience: _____

(Type and number of years)

Other performing experience, eg. on a musical instrument other than voice, or as an actor or dancer:

How often do you perform each year with a choir?

Have you ever performed as a soloist? If so, how many performances per year?

If you do not perform as a soloist, please could you briefly say why?

How many choral rehearsals do you attend per week?

How many different conductors have you worked with?

Other leisure activities:

Email Address:

Please tick box if you are happy to be contacted for a brief follow-up

☐

APPENDIX 8: Focus group ‘ice breaker’ exercise

Please take a few minutes to think about the following questions and discuss in pairs or small groups:

- **Why do you sing?**
- **What do you get out of it?**
- **What makes you want to participate in singing activities, such as choirs?**
- **What makes you want to perform as a singer?**

Once you have had chance to consider these questions, please share your thoughts with the rest of the group.

APPENDIX 9: Focus group interview guide

A. ISSUE DOCUMENTATION

- Information Sheets
- Consent Forms
- Pro-forma for Background Information

B. INTRODUCTION

- Background to my research
- Purpose of group interview
- Selection of participants
- Recording and note-taking
- Data storage and disposal, anonymity and confidentiality
- Reporting, publication and uses of data
- Structure of session

C. GROUND RULES

- Only one person to speak at once
- No 'side conversations'
- Inclusive approach: as many people as possible to contribute
- All contributions will be perceived as valid: we are exploring very personal subjective areas. We therefore need to respect other peoples' perspectives
- There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. The purpose of the research is to discover their opinions, experiences and feelings, and to learn from what they have to say.
- Confidentiality: we may have things to say that are quite personal at times, so we all need to remember the importance of maintaining confidentiality

D. BRIEF SELF-INTRODUCTIONS

Ask each participant to introduce themselves and to tell the group a little about their singing, i.e. where they sing and how long they've been singing.

E. 'ICE-BREAKER' EXERCISE

Have a think about why you sing, what you get out of it, and what motivates you to perform. Discuss in pairs (or small groups) and then share with the group. A simple 'prompt sheet' is provided for this exercise.

F. GENERAL DISCUSSION TOPICS AND PROMPTS

1. **In the last exercise, we thought about some of the reasons we sing and some of the positive things we get out of it. Please tell us about any experiences of singing that were not so positive, and how they might have affected you.**

2. **Now I'd like you to tell us about how you might describe a confident performer. How might they behave and perform? What kind of personality might they appear to have?**
3. **I'd like everyone to think of things that have helped with building confidence in their singing and performing and to share them with the group.**
4. **Now I'd like you to think of things that have not been so helpful in terms of building confidence as a singer and to discuss those.**
5. **Do you have any memories of early experiences that might have increased your confidence as a singer? Please tell us about that.**
6. **Do you have any memories of early experiences that might have had a negative effect on your confidence as a singer? Please tell us about that.**
7. **Are there any particular situations or aspects of performing or rehearsing that are helpful in creating a confident performance?**

How might rehearsals differ from performances, in terms of your confidence level?

Do different types of performance affect your confidence differently? Could you tell us about this?

8. **Are there any particular situations or aspects of performing or rehearsing that are definitely unhelpful?**
9. **Are there any individuals that you can think of (such as parents, siblings, teachers, conductors, partners, your own children) who have helped you to increase your confidence as a singer? Can you tell us about that?**

What did they do?

How did it affect you?

How do you feel about that now?
10. **Are there any individuals that you can think of (such as parents, siblings, teachers, conductors, fellow singers, partners, your own children) who have had a negative effect on your confidence as a singer? Can you tell us about that?**

What did they do?

How did it affect you?

How do you feel about that now?

11. Please tell us about anything you have learnt over the years that has helped to improve your confidence? Do you have any particular ways of helping yourself to feel confident about your singing or performing? If I was a young, nervous singer, what advice would you give me?

G. WINDING DOWN

Summarise the discussion so far, and check that I have appreciated most of the points that are important to them. Have I missed anything?

H. FINAL STATEMENT

Give everyone some time to prepare a final statement to share with the group. I'd like to know if there's anything further they'd like to add, any insights they've gained during the discussion, how they feel about the discussion.

I. THANKS

Thank everyone for participating. Explain that you might contact individuals for follow-up interviews or for further clarification by email.

APPENDIX 10: Individual interview guide

1. I'd like you to think about a recent performance that you enjoyed and tell me about what made it a good performance.

2. Now please tell me about a performance, or perhaps part of a performance, that you didn't find so enjoyable. What made that performance less enjoyable?

- *How did you feel during that performance? And afterwards?*

3. Now I'd like you to think about some aspects of performing that might affect your confidence in some way. Firstly, how might different venues affect your confidence?

4. How might the audience affect your confidence?

- *Have you noticed any different types of audience affecting you differently, eg. size or type of audience?*
- *How do you feel if you notice someone you know in the audience?*
- *Does it depend on who they are and how well you know them? What difference might these factors make to how you feel while performing?*

5. How might the type of performance affect you?

- *What types of performance that might make you feel less confident or more confident?*
- *How about auditions? How do you feel about them? What aspects of auditions might make a difference to your confidence?*

6. Does the repertoire have an effect on how confident you feel? How?

7. Does performing from memory feel different from singing from a score? How?

- *Is there anything that could be done to change how this affects you?*

8. Does the size of the group you are singing with affect how confident you feel in rehearsal or performance? What difference does it make? How do you feel about singing solo?

9. Does where you are standing in the choir make any difference to your confidence? How?

- *Does it make any difference how near you are to other singers, or particular singers? How?*

10. Does the formation of the choir, e.g. in a semicircle or double lines etc., have an effect? How?

11 . How do other singers in your choir, or elsewhere, affect your confidence?

- *What happens if you stand next to someone less confident than you are? Or if they are more confident?*
- *Does their confidence level have any effect on your opinion of them as a singer? What?*

12. If you realise that your performance is being filmed or recorded, does that make any difference to how you feel during the performance? How?

13. If you can play an instrument, are you more or less confident when you perform on that than when you sing in public? What makes the difference?

14. Why do you think some people are good singers and others not so good?

- *Do you think you can improve your voice by working on it? How?*
- *Do you think you can learn to improve your sight reading?*
- *How do you feel about learning to read music and sight-singing?*

15. How would you describe a confident singer? How do they behave?

16. Where do you think confidence comes from?

17. Do you remember any early experiences of performing as a singer or musician? How confident did you feel during those first performances? What might have affected your confidence level on those occasions?

- *Do you think any of those performances had an impact on your confidence levels in later performances? How?*

18. Do you think any other early experiences, aside from music-related events, have had any effect on your confidence, either as a singer or in general? If you feel happy to do so, would you please describe what happened and how it has affected you?

19. Did music teachers, either at school or instrumental/voice teachers, affect your confidence levels? How?

- *What do you remember about school singing? How might that have affected your interest in music? Or your confidence?*
- *Did any teachers ever say or do anything to make you feel less confident? What?*
- *How about teachers who might have helped to increase your confidence? What did they do or say?*

20. What about parents or other carers, when you were growing up? Did they help you to feel confident as a singer or musician? In what way?

21. Did your confidence increase or decrease as you grew up?

- *Was there any difference in your confidence in yourself as a singer as you became an adolescent? What happened?*
- *Any changes as you became an adult? What happened then?*

22. How about now? Are you noticing anything which affects your confidence (either positively or negatively as you get older?

- *Is your voice changing in any way?*
- *How does this affect how you feel about performing?*

23. We've talked about some of the people in your earlier life who might have had an effect on how you see yourself as a singer or musician. How about now?

- *How do partners, children, or friends, for example, react to your singing and performances?*
- *Is there anyone else who might have had effect on your confidence?*

For participants who are members of my choirs:

The next section is about conductors, which could be a difficult area to discuss, since I am the conductor of one of your choirs, but I wonder if there are any aspects of conductor behaviour that might have an effect on confidence.

Perhaps you could also think about other conductors that you've worked with, and refer to us anonymously, or generalize, eg. 'I find it difficult to feel confident when a conductor...' Any comments that are obviously about my behaviour will be taken philosophically, as a contribution to this research, rather than as a personal comment.

24. What characteristics or behaviour might be helpful in a conductor? What might not be so helpful?

- *What might a conductor do or say that could have an effect on your confidence?*

25. How might the way that rehearsals are run affect your levels of self-confidence?

26. What organisational aspects of performances might affect your confidence?

- *E.g. programme order and content, last minute rehearsals, whether you can see the conductor, the kind of things that the conductor might do or say during performance?*

27. We've talked about some of the people who might have helped you to improve your confidence, or who might have had the opposite effect. Are there any particular people whose feedback you value more than others?

28. Do you ever try to evaluate your own performance? If so, how might you do this?

- *What aspects of your performance are most important to you?*
- *Is this more or less important to you than the opinion of other people? Why?*

29. What do you do to help to increase your confidence before or during a performance?

30. If you were speaking to a young or inexperienced singer, what advice would you offer them about performing and building their confidence as a singer?

APPENDIX 11: Post-interview member check

Dear Singer

Thank you for participating in our recent Focus Group/Interview.

Please take a moment to read the following summary of the session:

The main themes identified were:

The themes that appeared to be most important to a number of participants were:

Please let me know if I have missed anything significant.

With many thanks

Michael

APPENDIX 12

The Phenomenon of Singing IX Proceedings

**Submissions for publication in an e-journal will be accepted
through September 30, 2013.**

Author(s):

Manuscript Title:

This manuscript will be considered with the understanding that it has not been simultaneously submitted to another publication and that the article or a variation of it has not been previously published.

Name:

(corresponding author)

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APPENDIX 13.

TRANSCRIPTION SAMPLE: EXTRACT FROM FOCUS GROUP

C: At the moment I'm singing with [mixed chamber choir] and [community singing ensemble]. We've talked about it together and we've got several pointers. We think that it makes us feel very happy and relaxed. Singing, we find it very uplifting. It helps tremendously with our memory...that it's good for our brains. We love all joining with friends to make music, and to know that it sounds good, and we're doing our best. We also feel that it helps with our breathing – anybody that's got chest problems - it helps tremendously to expand your chest and strengthen the breathing, strengthen the chest as well. Of course we all enjoy it tremendously, and we also feel that we're giving pleasure to other people when we're doing it, and we know that we are doing it to absolute perfection. We know we are giving a lot of pleasure to a lot of people, and of course a lot of pleasure and self-satisfaction to ourselves as well.

RESEARCHER: So it's like a sense of achievement as well?

All: Absolutely. Yes.

RESEARCHER: So, 'F', can you tell us where you sing, and how long you have been doing it.

F: I sing in [church choir] and [women's vocal ensemble].

K: I sing with [women's vocal ensemble].

F: Can I just add to that about participating. If you are a thoroughly nervous person but enjoy participating in singing, then belonging to a choir gives you that outreach, because you are not on your own. To sing on your own sometimes would be incredibly

difficult, but to stand within a group gives you a lot more confidence, and it does build your confidence as the weeks and everything go by.

K: I have been in other choirs but this is a small choir, and it's entirely different singing in a small choir than it is singing in a 40/50 choir, and I must say I do enjoy singing when we join up with [mixed chamber choir] - it's good to have the men. It's lovely to have a ladies choir, but when we do the concerts together it is good having more volume and the depth of sound that comes from the chaps – because they are always behind you.

X: I sing with [mixed chamber choir] at the moment. I have enjoyed singing with the choir because it's very fulfilling and it's nice to be in a close harmony group where you can be very...erm...where you need to be very aware of what the other people are doing. You're not there to be a soloist - you are there to listen to other people and blend in with everybody which is quite different from things I've done in the past. I've done a bit of solo singing and quartet and this kind of thing, so it's quite different to have a choir. Why do I sing? Because it lifts my spirits, makes me happy, it's good for my breathing – I'm asthmatic. It helps me no end with my breathing. I think it's very pleasurable, and it's giving yourself a sense of achievement, as well as seeing what other people get out of it when you are all together. I think that's the good thing about it. What makes me want to do it? Because it's such an enjoyable thing, I can't think of not singing – I was born singing! My family are all singers you see. and we grew up from an early age...You were put on the stage at 3 to sing your piece, and it's gone on from then really. And all my family do sing now so it's just a way of life really. It's very enjoyable singing in choir/ I wasn't quite sure after being in [Operatic Societies] how much I would enjoy the choir but I do, and I think the fact that we are taking it out and

giving other people pleasure...It's lovely when you've rehearsed a piece and you think, 'Yes, that's really good enough to take somewhere' and then you see the sense of achievement on other people's faces that are listening. That's really good.

W: I sing with [women's vocal ensemble]. We were quite surprised...We discovered X and I have quite a similar background because our family also always had music in the family and you had to take your instrument to family parties. There was a piano at the aunt's house and the grandma's house, and you had to be prepared to do your bit. And you weren't allowed to sit around doing nothing, so you were expected to join in.

RESEARCHER: So you are really used to doing that.

W: We both have done a bit of solo singing and so on, but there is this whole kind of supportive thing you get from a choir that you don't really get solo singing.

RESEARCHER: Do you prefer a choir then?

W: Yes, certainly now because my voice isn't as good as it was, but a choir just gives you such a different sort of physical and mental experience that solo singing doesn't really – it gives you the physical experience but not that one as much.

B: I sing with [women's vocal ensemble]. The only real history of music I've got is always singing with my dad. He's in the process of writing all the words down for me now as he's sitting at home and getting older, so that I can remember what we used to sing together. I've sung in church choirs and in a folk group, years ago, and we always used to troop off to homes for the elderly and sing for them at Christmas, but nothing formal at all. I just really enjoy it. It's been said before, most of the things – it helps me lift my spirits, it helps me to feel that I belong to something. Probably, like a lot of older people, it gives you something for you – whereas your life's been bringing up

your children and doing everything for them. Now I'm doing stuff for my parents. It's something I can do for me - something I can hold onto and enjoy for myself really.

H: I sing with [women's vocal ensemble]. It's my first singing experience for many, many years - actual singing. I used to do it as a teenager at school - Brownies, Guides all that sort of thing. But for many years I've been a primary school teacher and I've been on the other end, teaching children to sing – primary school children. So it's lovely for me to actually be doing some singing myself, which I really, really enjoy. We were saying all the same things as everybody else, why we like singing but also I like the challenge of learning new pieces 'cause I read music and I love seeing a new piece of music and seeing whether I can work out the notes before you actually play them. I just find that a challenge, because 'B' and I were saying that we're totally different. 'B' doesn't like the learning - she likes having learnt - and I like having the challenge of learning and learning to the end. When I retired I desperately wanted to do something for myself in the evenings 'cause as a teacher you don't have evenings really, and I just really wanted to do something that I enjoy and I just love the choir. I'd drop anything for the choir! It's just great and I really, really enjoy it.

W: It's surprising how irritated you get when something stops you – I couldn't go last Wednesday and I was really 'Ughhh!' [grimaces]

H: One of the reasons why we all enjoy it so much is because we have fun together. We're like minded people, so it's a social thing as well as really enjoying the singing, which I think is lovely.

E: I sing with [women's vocal ensemble] which is also a new experience for me now. I mean, I have sung in church choirs but not for a number of years, so I really enjoy it. I

was brought up in the church, so there's always been music in our family, and singing hymns etc, etc. My grandmother and my aunts they all played the piano and the organ, so whenever we were visiting them we always had to sing - sing round the organ or the piano. So music has been a large part of my life. But then, once you get married and have children, there is just not the time. So since I joined [women's vocal ensemble] it's brilliant. I really enjoy it. There are some evenings when you think, especially when it's cold and dark, you think, 'Oh!' [grimaces] But once you get there and you start singing it's really good. I don't have the confidence to sing as a soloist, so to be with like minded people to make music is good, and it lifts your spirits. And, like someone else said, it's good for your breathing. My breathing has improved tremendously since I joined [women's vocal ensemble]. I was speaking to someone who sings with [community choir] and I said, 'My breathing's really improved' and she said, 'yes it will.' And it has, so I think as a whole I feel better.

N: I sing with [women's vocal ensemble]. I haven't any...My parents weren't musical at all, so I don't know where it comes from with me. As far as I can remember, from the day I was born I think I wanted to sing and perform. I can remember when I was small thinking 'I love classical music!' and I can remember having a gramophone that my granny bought me - a little wind-up gramophone and there was some records and there was a record of Lily Pons - I don't know whether anybody's ever heard of her - and I can remember going to school and writing something about what I wanted to do when I grew up, and I put, 'I want to sing like Lily Pond.' [Laughter]. I've been involved in various things. The [children's brass band] was my first musical experience. I pestered my mother to let me join there, and I played the piano accordion which I loved. Then I went onto the [band]. With the [band] there was a concert party which

was 'WOW! This is it for me!' And I used to sing and perform. I can't remember what it was called now but I enjoyed it – it was many years ago. Then I sang with [band] and various things. When I went up North to live, I went to see this choir in one of the lunchtime concerts in [city] and there was this lovely a capella choir. I was absolutely mesmerised and thought 'I've got to join this', so I did and had the most wonderful time. What do I get from it? I think it's the most wonderful thing to be able to blast forth and sing, and to be in it with like minded people. And like 'F' said about being nervous, I am a bit, although I do like performing on my own – I don't now - I don't sing so well - but I'd always performed on my own, you know, singing on my own - led the church fellowship, learned to play guitar, and led the fellowship in the church while I was up North. I just think it lifts you out of depression if you tend to be a bit that way inclined, which I am - I do tend to get a bit 'winter bluesy' - and I think it's the best thing in the world to lift you out of it. I keep trying to tell everybody...Everybody you come across says, 'Oh I can't sing,' and I say, 'Course you can.' I know lots of people who say that they can't sing. A friend of mine who...she used to sing ever so funny but we used to do a praise and worship evening – I used to play guitar and she'd sing with me – and by the time we finished she was singing beautifully. So, you know, it's something that you can learn, I think.

RESEARCHER: I'm just going to throw a few questions out to you. If a question isn't relevant to you please don't worry. I don't need you to dredge up something that isn't there. But if you've got something to say, and you feel happy to share it with the group, please do. I'm going to say, in that exercise, we came up with some really positive things about why you do it, and what you get out of it. What I'd quite like to do know now is if there is anything in this area to share with the group...if there's any

instances of singing that you might have had at any point that perhaps weren't quite so positive. It sounds like you're all having amazingly positive experiences at the moment, but can you think of any times in the past where perhaps you didn't enjoy your singing for some reason. X is saying 'yes' ...

X: For a while, when I was singing with the [operatic societies] actually, I had some singing lessons with a lady in [village]. She was very good and used to sing with the [choral society] in [city], and I really enjoyed my singing lessons, and she did me a load of good, and I improved no end. It gave me the confidence to do solo performances really, else I wouldn't have before. But she used to have these soirées, and they were in her house, and you'd have to go in and sing your solo, and the people would be as near as you are to me now, just a few feet away. It was a big house...but friends and family were invited to come and listen to you, and I can remember getting half way through a song once and wishing the ground'd swallow me up because I was forgetting my words because I was so conscious that these people were here.

RESEARCHER: So was it about how close they were?

X: It was, and I think it was a bit of an ordeal as well. Had it been in a big room...We did them subsequently in the church hall and that was fine, but I think because everybody was sort of round you, you felt really intimidated by it. That's my experience. I didn't enjoy that.

RESEARCHER: No, it sounds like it was not enjoyable at all. Has anybody else got anything similar? Or perhaps different things that have made them perhaps not enjoy their singing sometimes?

C: Yeah. The Operatic did a show where we were totally under rehearsed and it was just awful. I went on the first night not knowing it and I went on the last night not knowing it, and I swore I would never, ever have that again. That was just awful, you cringed at the, you know, the thought of it.

RESEARCHER: Lots of people are nodding.

N: I used to belong to the (church fellowship) and I was picked to lead the praise and worship. It's an international thing – it started in America with two ladies wanting to share their faith with other people, and it's grown and grown until it's an international thing – it's ever such a big organisation. They had this meeting one night and they said, 'We feel that God wants you to lead the praise and worship', and I'd only just started to learn the guitar, and it was by myself. I got dropped in at the deep end, and I said, 'I can only play three chords.' And they said, 'That's alright, Cliff Richard could only play three chords when he started.' And I got dropped in at the deep end and I was playing a conference at the [school] in [county]. This great big conference - and I was supposed to be singing with another person, and the person didn't turn up until 5 minutes before we were going to go on and perform. It was all out of cog – my guitar wasn't tuned to the piano and it was horrendous!

RESEARCHER: That sounds like a good word for it. Has anyone else got something they would like to report?

B: The only thing I can think of really was I joined the choir sort of June, July time a couple of years back and then we did that performance at the end of August in [village hall]. I went along thinking I sort of know this but I'm going to keep checking my words. And then you're on there, and you open your mouth at some point and you think,

'What's coming out?' Nothing! And it's just that nervous thing, but I've got over that now. The last one we did at the church at Christmas, we started wrong...on the wrong note and had to re-start. And that didn't bother me. I thought 'Well, it would have been nice if we'd got it right', but a year ago I would have got in a right old dither about it. I just thought, 'No, we're all together, it's a little bit embarrassing but so what? Let's start again!' A year ago I wouldn't have felt that way at all.

H: That was our first outing as a group though, wasn't it?

B: It feels much better now when you get up there and everybody's looking at you.

K: You know that incident at Christmas - we all quickly realised that it wasn't right, and you [researcher/conductor] said 'Shall we start again?' And that was fine, wasn't it? Nobody was...I mean, I'm sure the audience thought 'Well, that was the right thing to do.'

N: You know what I think's nice? You know [soprano] stands next to me, and I'm ever so nervous...erm, saying, 'I'll never be able to do this - I can't do this,' you know. Everybody else seems to be able to read music pretty well and - but [she] always encourages me - she always - I feel she's encouraging me all the time. 'Cause I said the other night, 'I can't speak French, I'll never be able to do this,' and she says, 'You will, you will.'

H: That's the thing with our group - we all encourage each other. We all have different strengths, haven't we? And I think that's really nice. And that helps your confidence if you feel that other people are with you.

RESEARCHER: If you were going to describe a really confident performer how would you think they might behave and perform? Even if you just need to think of somebody

you know that you would think 'I really wish I could be like them and always be confident.' How would you describe them?

H: It shows in their body language usually, doesn't it? If somebody's sort of standing like that [demonstrates hunched posture] then they don't look confident, but whatever they are doing with their body, particularly their arms, I think that shows their confidence. Is that making sense?

E: If they come into the room or onto the stage with a big smile and walk with confidence.

F: I'd agree. It is down to body language a lot of the time - the way you stand and the way you look.

RESEARCHER: If you meet a really confident performer, what kind of personality might they appear to have? Do you make any assumptions about their personality based on how confident they seem to be?

F: You tend to think they are very outgoing people but that could just be a mask that once they're in front of people, dressed differently, doing a different job, then they're somebody else. It's an act.

X: It's like when you do a part on the stage isn't it?

F: You are being that person and not being yourself.

C: That makes a big difference. You can do an awful lot, hiding behind a part, that you probably wouldn't do.

X: People who do perform well, they don't show any nerves. They probably are nervous but they probably don't show it outwardly, and that makes you feel really confident.

K: Putting on a...you've got to put on a different face. I often wonder if people on the TV – well known actors and actresses – I sit and think 'You look exactly the same as the last part I saw you in'. But some people are absolutely different. I mean – I went to see [film]. I didn't like the film but [actress] was absolutely brilliant - you just thought it was [character]. There are lots of people on TV and they play lots of different parts and they are different every time, but there's a lot of people - especially people who come out of soaps - they just come out and perform their same soap character that they've done for years.

N: Is it [professional singer] who was married to [actor]? I saw her being interviewed, and you would think she was very confident, and she was saying how nervous she is even after all the years. She felt sick before she went on, sort of thing, and I think that what makes people a star is covering up.

RESEARCHER: So you think being able to cover the nerves..?

X: I think a lot of it's preparation as well. You've got to know it inside out and backwards, and if you can't remember what you're doing then you're lost aren't you?

W: Which is why musically, that thing of - not necessarily for choirs but with an instrument - if you don't play the scales...And actually it's true...My son the other day with his riding, which he does a lot, he loves - and he will not do enough flat work to become a good jumper. With horses you have to stay on the ground before you jump, and it's the same with playing the piano or singing or whatever. If you don't do that

ground work and really feel confident with it, then to stand up there and go 'Yes, I'm confident'...You haven't got it. That's why you [to 'C'] hated that Operatic experience. wasn't it? You didn't know it.

C: Without a doubt. Rehearsal and practice is the key to it all, and if you're taking a part you've really got to get inside it. There was a time when 'X' and I did Carousel and we had to sing 'You'll never walk alone.' And in rehearsals we couldn't stop crying and how we held it up on stage we'll never know. I didn't think I could do it, I didn't think we'll be able to pull it off but we did!

N: I actually did cry. I was only a little girl. The [church] was at the top of the street from where I lived and we used to go to that – it was the congregational church then – and I was singing on the platform at the anniversary, and I looked at me mum and dad sitting in the congregation and me dad was so proud, you know, and I started crying and I couldn't stop.

RESEARCHER: As an adult looking back now, 'N', why do you think you cried?

N: I don't know. Seeing my father so proud of me.

RESEARCHER: Right, so it was that was welling up...Now we've been thinking about confident people...Just have a little think about what might have helped with building your confidence personally in singing and performing. It can be any kind of example. It might be a person who's helped you, or some kind of experience, or something you've learned. I think I might go round the room with that, because I think you've probably all got something I guess to say about that. Let's start with K.

K: I don't really know what to say...I suppose really because I've performed since I was about 3 years old I've not really ever had a great difficulty with being confident.

RESEARCHER: So you've had it in you from when you were little...

K: Yes I mean singing was never my forte; I never have professed to be a good singer, I've always performed in front of people, done exams.

RESEARCHER: Do you think it's that experience that's helped you.

K: I think it, yes I think it does build up.

X: I think for me whether you're unsure of something and you're nervous about doing it – singing and then someone tells you, 'Yes, you are doing it quite well', – the praise and that somebody actually saying, 'You can do it. Don't be frightened of it. You actually can do it and you're doing it quite well,' that is a good...that gives you so much confidence as I said before... Before I'd had any private tutoring at all I wouldn't have gone for a part, and then I did some solo singing from that.

RESEARCHER: Do you think it makes any difference who it is who's telling you?

X: Yes I think you've got to have a rapport with that person. I had some singing lessons with yourself [researcher] and that did me a lot of good as well. I think you've got to have a rapport with that person, and I think you've got to trust what they're telling you and be happy with what they're helping you with. It's the same way when you've got a singing part – if you're doing a solo performance – if you're not happy with the person who's coaching you, you're not going to get on very well with it at all. When you're doing that one-to-one thing it's quite hard really.

W: It is true and certainly people telling you as students telling you, you are doing it well it does give you confidence. [Laughs] I was just remembering - I did years ago do more formal sort of music, and I had to sing in three languages, so I sang in Italian and

English and then the other language which I'd never spoken, never learnt at all, don't know anything about was German and [laughs] I did a well-known song, and so I had to learn it phonetically, which I do find quite difficult ,though I can learn the music easily enough - but the words I find difficult ,which is why I'm always banging on about 'I need the words!' Anyway I really struggled with this, and I really didn't think I could do it at all, and I was really worried because I hadn't got anybody to tell me it was OK – do you know what I mean? So, comes to the exam and I can remember it ever so clearly - I did two songs in Italian, then I did one in English, and then I did this German song, and it felt dreadful, and they decided not to hear my last song and I was quite relieved. Then he sat back and said right away, 'Your German accent is impeccable. But you need to go and learn better Italian'. Well, I had done Italian 'O' level and I was mortified - I was absolutely mortified - and I was sure these Italian songs had gone well. Anyway, when he said my German accent was impeccable, I just thought 'You're an idiot!' I was quite young, sort of – obviously not very sensible - so I just thought, 'What did he know?!' because he didn't know I couldn't speak German so I had absolutely no confidence at all in what he then told me about my performance and the rest of it. But it was a bizarre experience because if you've got somebody there saying 'That's really good, that's good,' you believe it.

RESEARCHER: Yes - except if you're discounting what they're saying if you don't trust them!

W: Those types of experiences are not real - in a choir they are. If you're singing with just two, three people in the room and you're just singing...In a choir, in a performance on stage, they are real, you know? You can understand why you're doing it, but there's something really odd about singing to three people that are looking with a slightly

glazed expression on their faces. They've probably heard, you know, 15 other people who could speak Italian.

B: I think really it's just seeing progression for myself. So when I came into the choir I hardly dared sing because I thought to myself, 'I'm going to get this wrong'...and gradually gaining confidence. and then after each performance even if just my husband said, 'God, you're so much better than last time,' that was enough to make me think, 'Oh, well,' because you don't want to be big headed and think, we were really good this time!' but you're hoping somebody else will say it. [laughter] You don't want to sound too over confident but, doing the last one, even after that false start you just have this feeling, 'Yes, we're getting it right and we're all blending together'. It just feels really good.

H: Yes, I feel exactly the same, I felt very unsure when I joined the choir because I hadn't sung really for years and years and years. It just the more you do - feed back from yourself [researcher/conductor] when you say, 'Hey, that sounded really, really good!' - and success. Once you know you're successful when you do things, even just you [researcher/conductor] saying 'That's good'...If you succeed at something then it gives you confidence and then you go from strength to strength. So I think its experience, success and feedback. Those are the main things.

E: Who's helped me? My grandmother initially. I think. because I'm the eldest of nine children, so I was palmed off to my grandmother quite a bit. She gave me confidence when she was playing, to sing with her and then recently since joining [women's vocal ensemble], *my mum* [surprised expression] who's not given to dishing out many compliments...The last concert we did, she said, 'That concert was beautiful. You all

looked so confident and enjoying what you are doing,' and I thought Oh that's good.

So that's given me a lot more confidence as well.

RESEARCHER: That's good – you'd been waiting all those years! [Laughter] [...]

APPENDIX 14.

TRANSCRIPTION SAMPLE: EXTRACT FROM SINGER'S INTERVIEW

RESEARCHER: I'd like you to think about a recent singing performance that you've enjoyed and tell me what made it good for you.

SINGER: Me singing...um...The second half of the last piece we did with the [choral society], only I can't remember what it was! [laughs] It'll come back to me.

RESEARCHER: So the second half, specifically?

SINGER: Yeah. It was The Creation. Haydn's Creation. And the first half, nobody seemed to really be that confident and it just didn't really take off. And in the second half, I don't know, I really enjoyed singing it, and I know I sang well, and at the end [conductor] sent an email to everyone, congratulating...saying it really took off in the second half. So I wasn't wrong. I think we were all just hesitant or something.

RESEARCHER: What do you think was making the difference in the confidence between the two halves?

SINGER: I don't know. from my point of view it was 'I'm just gonna sing! I'm not going to hold back.' Because...I don't know. I don't know why it took off. It wasn't just me. At the time I thought it was just me that was enjoying it much more, but it was much better.

RESEARCHER: And you said that the choir was more confident?

SINGER: Yeah.

RESEARCHER: And [conductor] noticed it as well.

SINGER: Yeah.

RESEARCHER: And I was going to ask about a performance or part of a performance that you didn't find so enjoyable...

SINGER: The first half! [laughs] No, the first one I did, which was...ah, do you know I can't remember what it was now? It was the one I did probably three years ago, and I just wasn't confident. It was my first piece of choral music for *many* years, and I hadn't been able...German Requiem...and I just didn't really get anything out of it because I didn't feel I knew it, so I was just going along and trying to remember it. But I was too stressed about it 'cause I just didn't think I knew it.

RESEARCHER: And was that about lack of time in rehearsals for you, or...

SINGER: No, lack of time because I was new to it, new to sight reading, and new to choral music, new to singing alto rather than soprano. So it was all just too quick. 'Cause we only do about twelve rehearsals, and for me it was quite a heavy piece, quite complicated. I didn't really enjoy it.

RESEARCHER: Was there a bit of a gap between joining this choir and the last time you sang with a choir?

SINGER: Yeah. Decades, actually. [laughs] Well, we have our little singing group in the village, which is altogether different, which I'd forgotten to put down on that form [points to background information form]. Yeah, the [village choir], I mean I have sung in that. So I have sung in that mini, mini choir recently.

RESEARCHER: That was before...

SINGER: Yeah, and in between as well. It's still going on occasionally. But before that it was a long time since I'd done any proper singing.

RESEARCHER: And what's different about your [village choir]?

SINGER: There's no parts, you all just sing in unison, they're all familiar pieces, and it's a good laugh. Wherever we perform people are just gonna take it as a group of friends standing up there and having a fun time, you know. So there's no pressure whatsoever. And I don't find it nerve-racking, and I don't find I need to practise for it 'cause it's no big deal. It's good fun.

RESEARCHER: Whereas with the choral singing?

SINGER: It's much more intellectual and complicated.

RESEARCHER: I'm going to ask about different aspects of performing that might or might not affect your confidence – either positively or negatively. Is there any aspect of particular venues that might make a difference to how confident you are in your singing?

SINGER: No [decisively]. I don't think so. No.

RESEARCHER: How about different acoustics or something like that?

SINGER: No, the only thing I have noticed is where the orchestra is and how big the orchestra is, because...and where the soloists sing, because they stand...There was one piece that we did with the [choral society], and it was a big orchestra – well, the percussion, which was big, was right in front of us, and...the singers, the soloists were immediately in front of us, and then the percussionists, and it was really hard to hear, and indeed to see. So it wasn't the room or the venue so much as the layout within the

venue that made it difficult because it's really hard to pick up your cue because there's too much going on.

RESEARCHER: And was that the first time you'd come across that sort of set up?

SINGER: Yes. Yeah.

RESEARCHER: Have you done it like that since?

SINGER: No. I don't know quite why it was, 'cause at other times the soloists have always been *off*, you know, not in front of the choir, but to the left or right of it, and I don't know why they were there but...and there were three of them and, you know, they were big people. I couldn't see the conductor at all. And I'm on the front row, so...And one was inhibited by singing in front of professional Covent Garden opera singers. [laughs] So it was a bit of an inhibitor.

RESEARCHER: So it's about layout?

SINGER: Yes, rather than the venue, 'cause it's the same venue as all the others. And it's never been a problem.

RESEARCHER: What's the usual lay out for your choir – how the voice parts are positioned normally?

SINGER: Well, the altos are...if you're facing the choir, the altos are on the right, and the basses behind – sopranos on the left, and the tenors behind them.

RESEARCHER: Is that how you always do it in rehearsal and performance?

SINGER: No. Rehearsals are...well, they're sideways. So we're in the bit of the church...the choir bit of the church, but we're facing inwards, just standing at an angle to face the conductor.

RESEARCHER: So choir stalls?

SINGER: Yes. But when we have the concert they turn all the chairs round so that we're facing the audience.

RESEARCHER: So in rehearsal who's behind you?

SINGER: There's no-one behind us. The altos are facing the sopranos, but turning to face the conductor, and [draws on table]...if these are the altos, these are the basses, these are the tenors, and the sopranos, and that's the conductor.

RESEARCHER: So it's sort of in a horseshoe, with sopranos opposite the altos and the basses and tenors at the end, so the gentlemen...it's not quite a horseshoe is it?

SINGER: No, it's like three sides of a rectangle.

RESEARCHER: And then in performance you turn round. So does that make any difference to you – the formation in which the choirs standing?

SINGER: Yes. I prefer to...Well, I suppose it's 'cause it's different, and you only get one dress rehearsal with everything in place so when you sing on the night, or at the dress rehearsal, it's disconcerting 'cause you can't hear the same cues, if you like, for how you've coped with...throughout the rehearsals, because you've got the altos behind you, but somehow the sound doesn't transmit in the same way, so it is a bit disconcerting, but I actually prefer to sing out to the...not across the church but down...

RESEARCHER: So the concert formation...

SINGER: Is how I prefer to sing, once...I just wish we could do more rehearsals like that actually, at the end of the practices.

RESEARCHER: In terms of where you personally are standing within the choir, does that make any difference to how confident you might feel about singing out?

SINGER: Yeah. Curiously, I like being on the front row. That's just where I landed up, but I'm...because I can see the conductor, and because the lady next but one to me is good [laughs] and I can hear – she's a good lead. No, I...Sometimes, before we all got our places, and nobody then moved, I would be at the back or wherever, you know, wherever there was a seat, and I didn't...I don't know, I like it on the front row!

RESEARCHER: You were saying about standing next to the lady who's good. One of my questions was going to be about whether it matters who you're standing next to...How do they affect you?

SINGER: Yeah...I've had different ones standing on my right sometimes, 'cause they're not all...they don't come every week, so it shifts a bit. It's quite nice to have people who know what they're singing on either side, because if I'm not quite sure I can actually learn from them.

RESEARCHER: How about their level of confidence – do you ever get a feel for how confident they are?

SINGER: Yes, yeah.

RESEARCHER: And how might that impinge on you?

SINGER: Well, it's the lady next but one who's very good. The lady next to me is probably not as good, and it's always reassuring when anyone gets it wrong as well

[laughs] 'cause you just feel that it's not just you, and sometimes the conductor will then say 'My God, you all got that wrong!' Or 'We need to do some more work on it.' It's just nice to know when other people get it wrong. But the lady next door but one never gets it wrong – she's a really brilliant sight singer. She's never been taught but she can just *do* it. So, yeah, I quite like having people who are *good* but not necessarily super confident. Or good *or* super confident, actually. But I wouldn't want them to be *bad*. I'd find that quite difficult.

RESEARCHER: And do you find that, if they're confident, or not confident, that any of that rubs off on you?

SINGER: Yeah, yeah. The good one would say to me...I was querying a note or something, and she said 'You ought to have the courage of your convictions.' She was being quite complimentary, in other words, you know - I was doing fine, I just needed to believe in it.

RESEARCHER: I was wondering if your peers ever say anything helpful or otherwise. It sounds like she was being quite helpful...

SINGER: Only because I asked. I mean, nobody would comment, I don't think. We all just get on with it. There *is* a lady who sits next to me quite often, who doesn't stop talking and tutting and muttering, and drives everybody bonkers.

RESEARCHER: Is that just irritating or...

SINGER: Excruciating irritation. Sometimes to the point where I can't concentrate on the music 'cause I'm waiting for her next rude comment.

RESEARCHER: Rude?

SINGER: Oh, she comments on the conductor! You know, he sort of says 'Right, all stand,' and then 'You may sit down,' or stand, you know, 'cause you often *are* up and down – it depends which bit you're doing and stuff – and she'll make comments about him, you know. Just 'Can't he make his mind up?' or 'Up and down, up and down. It's ridiculous.' Just...she's really rude! [laughs] And I want to tell her to shut up. But so far I haven't.

RESEARCHER: We've talked about where you stand etc. In performances, how might the audience make you feel?

SINGER: I never notice them.

RESEARCHER: Really? How do you achieve that?

SINGER: I just sing 'cause I want to sing. I never see the audience when I'm singing.

RESEARCHER: What do you focus on?

SINGER: Getting the right notes [laughs]. No! Sometimes when I'm...like the second half of the last piece that we did, I just focused on the enjoyment of singing. In the first half it wasn't enjoyable, but no, I just sing 'cause I want to sing. And it's a performance and it's fun. I really, *honestly*, don't notice the audience. So I wouldn't know if they're receptive or not.

RESEARCHER: So when you're singing in the choir, is it that you're looking at the conductor or...

SINGER: Yeah, I'm *big* into looking at the conductor!

RESEARCHER: So that's where you focus rather than the audience?

SINGER: Yeah. And if he's not conducting...if it's a soloist, then I'll just be listening to the soloist if I'm not singing – I just listen to them. Totally.

RESEARCHER: You've mentioned the large choral performances, and the less formal smaller choir, as well as solos. Are there any different types of performance that might make you feel differently in terms of confidence?

SINGER: I don't think it does. I think that when I'm actually doing the singing, that's where I am. Just *in* the singing at the time. I mean, in the solos, you know, at your...at the student concert, I have been *nervous*, but that was the first and second solo I'd ever done...and once I was into it, all I could think of, bar one or two split seconds, was getting the song sung, really.

RESEARCHER: So total concentration then?

SINGER: Yeah. Well...and enjoyment. I really, really enjoy it when I'm singing. I get very frustrated when I can't get the notes right, which obviously doesn't happen in solo bits, but does happen in the choral pieces, 'cause I don't know them note-perfect. But I don't think there's been anything really any different, whether it's the LMS [small, informal choir], a solo, or the choral pieces. I think I just want to sing at that point.

RESEARCHER: So you feel ready to go?

SINGER: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Does the repertoire make any difference to how you feel about the performance?

SINGER: The [village choir] doesn't really...it's not challenging enough. So in that regard, I mean...that just really is fun. But I'm always slightly frustrated that we can't actually do it in parts, but we don't.

RESEARCHER: You all sing the tune basically?

SINGER: Yeah. The most we'll do is we'll have the men and the women answering one another if the song is, you know...calls for it. Or do different verses. But we don't do parts at all, and so it's not...perhaps not quite challenging enough.

RESEARCHER: How many rehearsals would you have with them?

SINGER: About two [laughs]. That's why it's not very challenging! There wouldn't be time to be challenged.

RESEARCHER: So it's not challenging enough. Other than that?

SINGER: It's fine.

RESEARCHER: And what about your choral repertoire? Is there any variation in how you might feel about that?

SINGER: Well, basically, choral music's a bit frustrating – maybe *too* challenging! – because I'm not note perfect, and that irritates me.

RESEARCHER: What do you think could be done to improve on that?

SINGER: Well, I could...I was going to say do homework, but it's quite hard when it's a choral piece, to do it on your own. It's not that I don't necessarily know my notes, 'cause there are ways that you can learn it with these various CDs you can get, or go online, but it's coming in and hitting the right note against everybody else, so I don't

know how I could improve, so...unless they had more rehearsals, a few more, but I don't think...

RESEARCHER: I was going to ask if there's anything that could be done in rehearsals to help with that, but you're thinking more rehearsals, probably?

SINGER: Yeah...yeah, I think more rehearsals. Or even if – it would amount to the same thing – for those that weren't terribly confident about certain bits, to do...you know, take them aside and have extra rehearsal, but it's the same – extra rehearsal time, really. But, you know, for anyone to say 'I don't get this passage, or that passage,' but I can't see that happening.

RESEARCHER: Do you get the impression that there might be quite a few people who feel like that, or...is it hard to tell?

SINGER: I don't know...I think it's hard to tell. I mean, during rehearsals sometimes people will generally mutter that 'Oops, that went really wrong,' 'cause *all* of us got it really wrong or something. And *occasionally* you can pick up that other people got lost as well. But you know, I ultimately think it must be quite a good choir because of the standard and status of the soloists we get. I don't think they would do solo performances if we were total rubbish because it wouldn't enhance their reputation at all. So I think we must be reasonably good.

RESEARCHER: And for your choir, do they audition, or check out that you can read or anything like that?

SINGER: No, we just turn up. Yes [laughs], I don't know what happens if you can't sing!

RESEARCHER: What sort of size choir is this?

SINGER: About a hundred. On the books. They're not all there all the time.

RESEARCHER: So for a normal performance, how many do you reckon would turn out for that?

SINGER: Sixty to seventy? No, that's only 15 to each voice isn't it? Seventy-five probably.

RESEARCHER: How does the MD decide who's going on which part?

SINGER: He leaves it to us. 'Cause when I started I went into the sopranos, 'cause that's where I'd always been in the past, and then realized there was no way I could get it – the notes – so I said something to him, and he said, more or less 'Whatever. Go down to the alto.' Completely self-selection, really.

RESEARCHER: And what happens, do you think, if someone's not coping?

SINGER: Well, the only ones it shows is with the tenors, because obviously they're quite small – they usually are – and they might struggle more, so he would just help them more, I suppose. But I think the altos are actually quite good and quite strong, so...No, he would always...he always treats you as a mass, you know, as mass of sopranos, a mass of altos, so I don't know – if someone was singing really loud and off-key, I don't know what would happen. I've never heard it.

RESEARCHER: Do most people stay for quite a while?

SINGER: Mmmm...Yeah, yeah. It's been, you know...some of them have done the pieces that we're now doing twenty years ago or something [laughs]. And it's the same...yes, people stay.

RESEARCHER: Do you get many people who turn up and just do a few? I'm thinking back to what you said about self-selection.

SINGER: No...most people come and stay. Sometimes they'll go for a whole term, so they won't do a piece, and then they'll come back, you know – they may not do the Spring term but they'll be back for the Autumn term, which I guess if they know they're going to miss loads of rehearsals, it they can't come.

RESEARCHER: Does performing from memory rather than from a score make any difference to how confident you feel?

SINGER: Completely without book? Not just looking up and not...so completely without? Um...well, if I am *fully* rehearsed, then it's kind of quite nice to sing from memory, once one has one's...once I have got over the 'Oh, I'm going to forget the words, or start the wrong the last verse first.' In my exam [recent Grade 5 Singing], I quite enjoyed singing without the accompaniment of the book really. Quite nice. You get more into it. I mean, the *idea* is a bit scary, but in reality it was quite fun really, doing it without the score.

RESEARCHER: And the advantage without the book?

SINGER: I don't know...I suppose I can sing...I was going to say...from the *heart*. I'm quite sure...from the head and the heart, or something, I don't know. I think...I know! This is going to sound really mad but it's like I'm singing from within *me*, not from the book. It's just me, you know, whereas the book is very much a prop, and it's something...I don't know...it feels more *complete* doing it without the book. It's like my voice is my instrument and my brain is what's making it work or something, and I don't

need anything else, so once I've learnt it, then it's just 'Here I am!' [laughs]. It's hard to explain really, but I kind of like not having the adjunct of the book.

RESEARCHER: We talked about the size of the choral society. How many are in the smaller choir?

SINGER: Oh, anything from ten to...eleven! [laughs] No – not many. There's...we used to have a few more, but it's fizzled out a bit. It's very small.

RESEARCHER: Do you think the size of the group might make any difference to how confident you feel?

SINGER: I know that if I was able to join a kind of chamber choir or a really, really small choir, which I really want to do, I would find it a real challenge, and therefore much more stressful, so I mean, that's what I'm aiming to do, but I can't find a chamber choir in [town], singing the kind of music that I want to sing.

RESEARCHER: What would make it more of a challenge for you in a chamber choir?

SINGER: I couldn't fluff and notes because it would just be...I don't know...how many people there might be in each part, but...half a dozen, I've no idea what you'd get in a chamber choir, but it would be a really...I'd have to learn every note and that's what I want to do. I think that's why I enjoy the singing lessons, 'cause I know every note of the song, and I find that satisfying.

RESEARCHER: So you'd like to find a smaller group?

SINGER: I'd like to do both. I want to sing with an orchestra and sing madrigals or something.

RESEARCHER: I have a few more questions about practicalities. If you realize that your performance is being recorded in any way, does that have any effect on how you feel about performing?

SINGER: It's hypothetical isn't it?

RESEARCHER: Has it happened to you?

SINGER: No. I honestly don't think it would, because if you've got an audience – whether they're, you know...some of them might be recording it for all I know – it doesn't really...it wouldn't bother me actually. I mean, if I was doing a solo...I don't think it was...it would...I think it is this idea that once I'm singing that's all I'm doing, and I really don't *see* or hear or notice anything else that's going on around me, as I say. *Except* when I know...when I did the first or second solo, halfway through I thought 'Oops, I got that note wrong.' Or 'The timing was wrong,' or something. So part of me was not totally in the song but in the criticism. But *mostly* I was singing 'cause I want to sing, 'cause I like it. So I don't think I really notice what's going on around me, and...Actually, even when I know I've got the wrong note, that's not noticing what's going on around me, that's just me and my singing.

[...]

