

## Choreography For Beginners

Holland Harmony/DABS  
Harmony College 2014

### Introduction

- ◉ Welcome to the job of choreographer
- ◉ Why did you take this job?
  - Passion
  - Ability
  - Nobody else would do it
- ◉ Challenging
  - The part of the performance no one wants to do
  - The part no one has the time for

### Introduction

- ◉ Despite all that, you still have a very important job in your group and can have a significant impact on the group

### Introduction

- ◉ Why do we add choreography or presentation elements?
  - Give a fantastic song the excitement it needs
  - Raise the level of a not so great song
  - Add variety and interest to a show lineup
- ◉ We are adding choreography to enhance the performance of the song.

### Four Classes

- ◉ What do you have in front of you?
- ◉ The Blank Page
- ◉ Teaching the Masses
- ◉ Fixing the Messes

At the end of the class, we'll look at some of the songs you're working on and brainstorm some ideas together.

## What do you have in front of you?

Or... "What have I gotten myself into?"

## Before you get all excited...

...you need to understand what it is you're working with.

And we don't start with your chorus.

We start with you.

## What am I good at?

- ◉ Creativity
- ◉ Dance ability
- ◉ Teaching ability
- ◉ Drilling
- ◉ Planning
- ◉ Putting thoughts on paper
- ◉ Putting thoughts into words
- ◉ Putting movement into words
- ◉ Evaluating on the fly
- ◉ Delegating
- ◉ Self-Criticism
- ◉ Criticism from others
- ◉ Knowing what the audience wants
- ◉ Leadership

## What am I not good at?

It is as important, if not more important to know where your skills are lacking.

These are the areas that will:

- ◉ Give you the most difficulty
- ◉ Use up the most time

These are the areas that you want to focus on to improve and/or get help with.

## Ways to Improve Yourself

- ◉ Courses (like this one!)
- ◉ Coaching – for you and your group
- ◉ Observation
  - Other BBS groups
  - Theatre
  - Movies
  - YouTube
- ◉ Grow your team with people who have the skills you don't have.

## Who Should I Get on My Team?

- ◉ Choreographer
- ◉ Idea generator
- ◉ Recorder
- ◉ Drill Sgt.
- ◉ Reviewers
- ◉ Row or Section captain
- ◉ Set/Prop Masters

If they don't exist within the chorus membership, go outside for them.

## But Enough About You...

Now go through the same process with the group you are working with.

The skillset to look at is a little different though.

## What is My Chorus Good At?

- Precision
  - Emotion
  - Understanding Lyrics
  - Speed of Learning
  - Coordination
  - Stamina
    - Mental
    - Physical
    - Emotional
  - Awareness
    - Physical
    - Emotional
  - Courage
  - Desire
- What are their strengths and what needs development?

## Can I START Now?

No.

There's one more group you need to make sure you understand before you jump in and start creating things...

...your AUDIENCE!

## Knowing Your Audience

- Knowing who you're performing for will start to give you ideas on what will or will not work.
  - Age Range
  - Diversity
    - Cultural
    - Musical
  - Typically the same group of people or does it change from show to show?

## Homework

- Take some time to answer some of these questions about the group you are working with before we get into our next class.
- Find me during a break, meal, etc and ask me questions.

## The Blank Page

Dun dun duhhhhhhh!

## Where to Start?

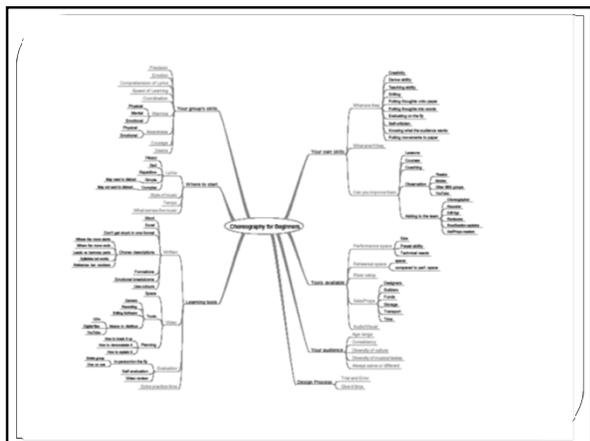
- How do you know if a song needs choreography/staging/something?
  - Great song, big impact – standing there and singing it just doesn't seem right.
  - Pretty good song, but on it's own doesn't have the impact that it's capable of.
  - Corny or silly song (it happens in BBS) that on it's own just won't connect with the audience.

## Where to Start?

- ◎ There will be songs that the second you hear it, you'll have an idea of what you want it to do/look like/feel like.
  - Then 24 hours will go by and you'll think that idea is stupid.
- ◎ There will also be songs where you know something needs to happen but you will not have the slightest clue what to do with it for the longest time.

## Where to Start?

- ◎ Mind Mapping (Brainstorming)
  - Go through a brainstorming process
  - Write down any ideas/thoughts/questions that come to mind.
  - Put it on paper or use software (Freemind)



## Want Answers? Ask Questions.

- ◎ What do I want from this song?
  - Energize the audience
  - Make them laugh
  - Catch them off-guard
  - Tug on the heart strings
  - Understand the Lyrics
  - Listen to the message
  - Build to a key moment in the song
  - Build to another song entirely

## What Do the Lyrics Say?

- ◎ Happy or Sad?
- ◎ Relaxed or Intense?
- ◎ Meaningful or Fluff?
- ◎ Romantic or Lustful?
- ◎ Etc...

## Who Wrote it Originally?

- ◎ Less important if the lyrics aren't meaningful
- ◎ Why did they write it?
- ◎ What did they write about?
- ◎ What inspired them?

## Other Questions

- ⦿ What is the musical style?
- ⦿ What is the tempo?
- ⦿ Actual dance or movement?
- ⦿ Barbershop style or alternative?
- ⦿ What best serves the music?
- ⦿ Where will we be performing this?

## Building It Up

- ⦿ This may vary from song to song how you approach it.
- ⦿ The first thing to do is break the song up into sections:
  - Intro
  - Verse (1,2,...)
  - Chorus (1,2,...)
  - Bridge
  - Tag
- ⦿ It will make the job less imposing

## Plant the Seed

- ⦿ What you do with the song will start with an idea:
  - A particular style of dance or movement
  - A certain feel/or attitude you want
  - A highlight moment
- ⦿ Start with wherever your initial inspiration is and build on it, even if it's not at the start.

## Fill In the Blanks

- ⦿ The tricky part is what's left over after you've exhausted your initial inspired idea.
  - Blank sections of song to fill
  - Exact details of moves to use

## Fill In the Blanks

- ⦿ When you start to get stuck, step back and look at what you have so far.
  - What's missing?
  - How does it build – do I need smaller movement in order to build up throughout the song?
- ⦿ Ask yourself questions about what you need to fill in those missing pieces.

## Seek Help

- ⦿ Not sure what steps or moves to do?
- ⦿ Work as a team – bounce ideas around.
- ⦿ Research
  - Look up other performances of a similar feel/style and look for ideas.
  - No shame in stealing ideas to get your brain rolling... within reason. ☺

## Try It Out

- ◎ Run the steps you've laid out
  - Can you do it?
  - Can it be done in large numbers?
  - Can it be done in tight spaces?
  - Does it fit naturally?
  - Does it look good?
- ◎ If something doesn't work, don't be afraid to throw it out and try something else.

## Reviewing the Final Product

- ◎ Do you still like it?
- ◎ Do other people like it?
- ◎ Does it grow throughout the song?
- ◎ Are there changes and contrast in it or is it kind of the same throughout?
- ◎ Does it make sense with the lyrics?
- ◎ Are moves timed intuitively (i.e. pickups, pushed beats, etc)

## Examples of Contrast

- ◎ Snap moves vs Fluid moves
- ◎ Movement vs Stillness
- ◎ Intense vs Relaxed
- ◎ Big vs Small
- ◎ Organized vs Chaotic
- ◎ Pushing it in one direction earns you the opportunity to switch it to another direction.

## Helpful Hints

- ◎ Give yourself time... lots of it!
- ◎ Enjoy the process
- ◎ More often than not, simple is better
- ◎ Take notes or record yourself during the trial and error process so you don't forget what you did when you come back to it!
- ◎ Always keep in mind:
  - Your skill set
  - Your group's skill set
  - Your audience

## Homework

- ◎ Pick a song that you need to create a choreo plan for and look for "the seed".
- ◎ Find something about the song that jumps out at you and write it down, even if you think it's a silly or stupid idea.
- ◎ If there are multiple ideas, write them all down.

## Teaching the Masses

"That's not what it looked like in my head."

## Before you begin...

- ◎ Let's start with some assumptions:
  - The chorus won't be as excited about this as you are... at least for now.
  - They will not learn it as quickly as you think they will.
  - They will not work in it between practices as much as you hope they will.
  - At some point the director will ask you to change something.
  - You will doubt yourself at some point.

## Approach to Teaching

- ◎ Put the time and energy in at the front end to save time later.
- ◎ Create learning tools to allow the teaching process to start before you start working in practice.
- ◎ It doesn't mean the chorus will show up knowing it, but it will give you a head start.

## Written Plans

- ◎ Handy to the chorus as a reference during practices.
- ◎ Handy to you as well when you start getting questions fired at you clarifying details.
- ◎ Let's look at some examples.

## Written Plans

- ◎ Clarity is most important
- ◎ Use colours, fonts, etc to add clarity
- ◎ Change the format to suit the song as necessary, as long as it resembles past plans (familiarity).
- ◎ Every time changes are made:
  - Resave as a new file with a new date
  - Put the revision date at the top of page 1
  - Highlight everything that has changed.

## Written Plans

- ◎ Understand the importance of where the move starts and where the move ends.
- ◎ Tie in to syllables or beats in the music, not whole words.
- ◎ If a move cue falls on a rest, write in (rest) as if it were a word in the lyrics.
- ◎ Show both melody and harmony lyrics if they are different.
- ◎ Show pickups in (brackets)

## Written Plans

- ◎ Multiple written plans might be needed for a single song:
  - Front row movements
  - Formations
  - Different riser plans

## Video

- ◎ This can be a good chunk of work, but once you get into a routine about it, it gets easier, and it's really helpful.
- ◎ There are nuances and details that cannot be accurately described in words.

## Video

- ◎ You will need:
  - A video recorder (prefer digital); maybe a tripod
  - An audio setup with an iPod or similar where you can easily start or stop the music from anywhere in the song.
  - A space large enough to do the movement you need to do and record it properly.
  - A simple video editing program (Windows now comes with one).
  - (if not you) someone who knows how it all works.

## Video

- ◎ Record in small chunks
  - Easier for you to remember
- ◎ Script it and rehearse it if you need to.
- ◎ Be aware of left and right
  - Are you doing a mirror image or actual left/right?
- ◎ Be aware of:
  - Split moves
  - Row moves
  - Different cue words for different voice parts.

## Video

- ◎ Record the instruction of a section, then record a run through of that chunk of the song.



## In Person

- ◉ Working in front of the chorus can be challenging but also very rewarding.
- ◉ You might not be the person to do it.
- ◉ Do:
  - Be confident in what you're telling them
  - Be positive in how you convey the instructions
  - Be encouraging when something looks good
  - Have more enthusiasm and energy than them.
  - Make it a fun experience.

## In Person

- ◉ Avoid:
  - Allowing your frustrations to show.
  - Correcting people in a derogatory manner
  - Singling people out unnecessarily in front of the group – raise it as a general observation or speak to the person privately.
  - Giving answers to questions on the spot if you aren't sure. Tell them you'll think about it/check and get back to them.
  - Making it feel like a chore.

## Final points

- ◉ The music and the choreography will be learned separately and then when it is put together, both will suffer for a time.
- ◉ Repetition is key.
- ◉ Extra practice time (30 minutes before practice starts for example) may be needed.
- ◉ Be prepared to change something in the moment.

## Fixing the Messes

Oh yes... there will be messes.

## The Part that Never Stops

- ◉ You will always be fixing, adjusting, working, etc.
- ◉ It will challenge you to come up with new instructions, approaches all the time.
- ◉ This isn't a bad thing.
- ◉ Small changes and adjustments can keep things from getting stagnant.

## Some General Tips

- ◉ If you're given a chunk of time to work on a song, often the best thing to do is run it top to bottom first.
- ◉ It might be awful, but gives the chorus a chance to just plow through it and start getting it into their brain.
- ◉ Another approach is to always start with that one section of the song that always gives them trouble.

## Why Doesn't It Look Right?

- ◉ If you tell a mechanic your car is making a funny noise, does he know right away how to fix it?
- ◉ No – he has to look closely and figure out what the actual problem is.
- ◉ Fixing choreography can be very similar.
- ◉ You have to look carefully at what is going on and what is causing it to be wrong in order to fix it.

## Why Doesn't It Look Right?

- ◉ Things to look for:
  - Starting point or ending point?
  - What part of the body does the move start from?
  - Do they understand the purpose of the movement?
  - Focus points – director, audience, left, right, etc.
  - Extra movement where you don't want it.
  - Long duration moves – arriving too quickly or not in time.

## Group Coaching vs Individual

- ◉ There is a time for instruction for the group and a time for one on one.
- ◉ You can use team members to correct individuals while you instruct the chorus.
- ◉ The person will appreciate a more private instruction rather than being singled out.
- ◉ If one person is really having trouble, take them aside for a bit to work it out.

## Evaluations

- ◉ Sometimes, for a big event, i.e. a contest, you'll want to do reviews for people.
- ◉ Setting up video cameras is really the only good way to do this.
- ◉ Depending on the size of the group, more than one might be necessary.
- ◉ Also allows you to break the chorus up into groups and have different people reviewing.

## Self-Evaluations

- ◉ These can be equally effective and take less time.
- ◉ Post the videos so the chorus member can review his or her own performance.
- ◉ Sometimes you can even have them send you a write up on what they observed.

## Final Tips

- ◉ Listen to any questions/suggestions the chorus presents to you. Some might be valuable.
- ◉ Try to keep video recordings of performances. Changes happen in practice and it might end up a more accurate record than the original learning video

### Final Tips

- ◎ Work with your director(s) to figure out the best way for you to work together in front of the chorus.
- ◎ Never be afraid to ask for help.
- ◎ Never stop learning.

### Let's Try Some of This Out

- ◎ Anyone have a song that we can look at as a group and start brainstorming?
- ◎ pat\_of\_brown@yahoo.com