

Owning the Choral Sound: Utilising Real Time Spectrographic Data to Improve Choral Blend

The phenomenon of Choral Blend is ill defined in the literature, with agency passing from conductor to choir and back. Partly noun; the choral aesthetic with which a conductor and audience experience the ensemble sound; partly verb, the technique of singing that vocalists employ when performing in an ensemble, this term is ubiquitous tacit knowledge for many singing professionals. This live workshop presentation with high level choral musicians seeks to continue the work of John Nix in a real-world rehearsal setting in answering the question:

Can Real Time Individual and Corporate Spectrographic Data Improve the Audience / Singers Perception of Choral Blend?

The National Youth Chamber Choir of Great Britain (NYCGB) is an elite, auditioned group of singers and alumni of the NYCGB. With an emphasis on tuning, individuality, and artistry leading to a collective ensemble sound, the NYCGB musicianship curriculum provides its singers with a platform to critically evaluate their own singing as part of a larger ensemble. The familiarity with each other and 'NYC sound' that these singers achieve in intense residential courses make them an ideal group to work with in this live rehearsal workshop.

Part of the problem in using real time spectrographic data as a rehearsal aid lies in the dichotomy in intonation and temperament issues in the horizontal melodic line of the singers, and the vertical harmonic context of a group singing together. Whilst Nix used whole choir spectrographic data to tune individual chords, the use of similar tools in 1-2-1 singing lessons for the identification and alteration of timbral (and therefore quality measures) are strong. Combining these two techniques with the singers in the room will allow for a more cohesive approach to this technology.

Utilizing VOCE VISTA as well as handheld electronic devices and mobile applications, the group will work towards a performance of Bruckner's *Os Justi*. Through a facilitated discussion of the quantitative acoustic results, as well as qualitative vocal and physiological feedback of the singers, we will not only be able to make manifest some of the issues surrounding choral blend, but also as group vocal tuition and conductoral intervention.



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James Slimings is a PhD candidate at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland where he is also a lecturer in the School of Music as well as Chorus Master and Choral Coordinator. His research *Choral Blend, Sound or Sensation: An Interpretive Phenomenological Investigation in to Trained Singers Experiences of Ensemble Singing* has been presented in various guises such as at *the Oxford Conducting Institute's* annual conference at Sydney Conservatorium, Australia; the *International Symposium on the Histories and Practices of Choral Singing* at Lund University, Sweden; *Conservatoires UK Research Student Conference*, Glasgow; and the *SEMPRE Music, Education, and Technology Conference*, London. For the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain, James has been a research assistant on their Created Out of Mind project, as well as conductor, singing teacher, and animateur. He also conducts for the London Youth Choir, Glasgow Cathedral Choral Society, and is Director of Music at the Robin Chapel, Edinburgh.