

Maximizing Rehearsal Efficiency: Embracing Learning Tracks

Justin La | Chairman: Next Gen Barbershop Committee – Land O' Lakes District

Introduction

Barbershop music, known for its rich harmonies and distinctive style, has embraced a unique approach to learning and rehearsal: the use of 'learning tracks'. These tracks, created by skilled artists like Kohl Kitzmiller, Kim Newcomb, Tim Warick, Nicky McGrath, Kim Kraut, Tunes For 4, Studio Upbeat, Adam (Flerb) LeFebvre, SgtSonny, and Kyle Kitzmiller, have become an essential tool for singers to master their parts efficiently.

The Mechanism of Learning Tracks

Learning tracks are custom-made audio recordings that focus on individual vocal parts. They are designed in such a way that one audio channel (left or right) prominently plays a specific vocal part (such as Lead, Tenor, Baritone, or Bass in barbershop music), while the other channel plays the background harmony parts at a lower volume. This dual-channel approach allows singers to concentrate on their individual parts with clarity and understand how they fit into the overall harmony of the piece.

Advantages of Learning Tracks

1. **Accelerated Part Learning:** Learning tracks significantly reduce the time required for singers to learn their parts. For example, a bass singer can practice with the track repeatedly, focusing on tricky intervals or rhythms, leading to quicker mastery of their part.
2. **Vocal Modeling:** These tracks provide a clear example of the desired vocal quality and style, which is particularly beneficial for teaching correct vowel shapes, tone quality, and musical expression.
3. **Customized Practice:** Singers can practice at their convenience, focusing on challenging sections, thus allowing for more targeted and efficient rehearsals.
4. **Musical Contextualization:** By practicing with other parts in the background, singers gain a better understanding of their role within the ensemble, improving musicality and ensemble cohesion.

Implementation in Rehearsals

1. **Focused Individual Practice:** Using headphones during personal practice, singers can focus intently on their parts, adjusting the balance to slowly integrate the other parts as they become more confident.
2. **Effective Sectionals:** Utilizing speakers in section rehearsals, each vocal section can work with their predominant part in the foreground. This method allows for focused learning, followed by gradual integration for ensemble blending and balance.
3. **Full Ensemble Integration:** Once individual parts are learned, the choir can rehearse together without the tracks, applying what they've learned to the ensemble context. This approach leads to more productive rehearsals focused on dynamics, phrasing, and expression rather than note learning.

Expanded Application in Traditional Choral Settings

In traditional choral settings, where learning often relies on group rehearsals and piano accompaniments, integrating barbershop-style learning tracks could transform the learning process. Choir directors can allocate more rehearsal time to artistic aspects like phrasing, dynamics, and emotional expression, knowing that singers have already mastered their notes and rhythms.

Potential for Enhanced Musical Experience

The use of learning tracks could foster a deeper individual connection to the music, as singers take ownership of their learning process. This method could also promote a stronger sense of ensemble, as singers come to rehearsals better prepared, leading to a more cohesive and expressive performance.

Differentiated Instruction and Learning Efficiency

1. **Immediate and Continuous Access:** Learning tracks provide students with the ability to practice their parts anytime and anywhere. This constant accessibility means more frequent and consistent practice opportunities, which can dramatically accelerate learning.
2. **Focused Learning:** With learning tracks, students can focus solely on their part without distractions. This concentrated approach allows for more in-depth learning of their lines, leading to quicker memorization and understanding.
3. **Error Reduction:** Learning tracks provide a precise reference for pitch and rhythm, reducing the likelihood of learning parts incorrectly. This minimizes time spent on correcting mistakes during group rehearsals.
4. **Contextual Learning and Confidence:** Students hear their part in the context of the entire ensemble, which not only helps them learn their lines faster but also understand how their part fits within the whole piece. This context builds musicality and confidence.
5. **Accommodating Different Learning Styles:** Audio learning tracks cater to auditory learners who may struggle with reading music or learning from a keyboard. This inclusivity can significantly enhance the learning process for a broader range of students.
6. **Repetition and Personalization:** Students can repeat challenging sections as needed and at their own pace. This level of control over their learning process is not possible in traditional group rehearsals and can lead to much faster mastery of the music.
7. **Reduced Dependence on Accompanists:** In the traditional method, students often rely on accompanists to learn their parts. Learning tracks eliminate this dependency, allowing for more efficient use of rehearsal time for refining performance rather than learning notes.
8. **Enhanced Engagement:** Learning tracks can make the learning process more engaging and enjoyable, leading to increased motivation and practice time.
9. **Immediate Feedback:** Singing along with a learning track provides immediate feedback on how well a student is matching pitch and rhythm, which is crucial for quick learning.

10. **Building Ensemble Skills:** Even when practicing alone, students using learning tracks are continuously exposed to how their part harmonizes with others, fostering a better sense of ensemble playing and tuning.

Conclusion

Integrating barbershop learning tracks into choral rehearsals presents an innovative and effective approach to learning music. It encourages personal responsibility in musical preparation and leads to a more nuanced and expressive ensemble experience. This method not only streamlines rehearsal efficiency but also elevates the overall quality of choral performance.

Free Resources (Learning Tracks)

Keep The Whole World Singing – Sheet Music – Learning Tracks (TTBB)

<https://shop.barbershop.org/keep-the-whole-world-singing-ttbb-free-digital-sheet-music/>

Keep The Whole World Singing – Sheet Music – Learning Tracks (SATB)

<https://shop.barbershop.org/keep-the-whole-world-singing-satb-free-digital-sheet-music/>

List of Some Learning Track Creators

Name	Link
Barbershop Harmony Society - Learning Tracks	www.shop.barbershop.org/sheet-music-learning-tracks/
Flerb's Robo Quartet - Learning Tracks by Adam (Flerb) LeFebvre	www.barbershopconnections.com
Kim Kraut - Barbershop Learning Tracks	www.kimkraut.com
Kim Newcomb - Learning Tracks	www.newvoice.studio
Kohl Kitzmiller - Learning Tracks	www.kohlkitzmillermusic.com
Kyle Kitzmiller - Learning Tracks	www.harmonize.com/kitzmiller
SgtSonny Learning Tracks	www.sgtsonny.com
Studio Upbeat - Barbershop Learning Tracks	www.studioupbeat.com
Sunshine Tracks - Barbershop Learning Tracks	www.sunshinetracks.com

TimTracks - Learning Tracks by Tim Warick	www.timtracks.com
Tunes For 4 - Custom Designed Learning Tracks	www.tunesfor4.com

Barbershop and Choral Learning Track Maker

Learning tracks, once a unique feature of barbershop music, are now revolutionizing choral music learning as well. With the introduction of websites Choral Tracks , these valuable tools are accessible for a wide range of choral repertoires, offering the same benefits of efficient and focused practice to choir students and directors alike. See link below:

www.choraltracks.com