

SINGING WITH OTHERS | Sheri Gould

Is there a difference between how you sing as a soloist and how you sing with others? There should be! When you are a soloist or a worship leader, what you can do with your voice is quite different than what you should be doing as part of a team. This month I'd like to have a look at some of those differences and how you can become more skilled at singing with others.

ARE YOU A GOOD SINGING PARTNER?

It all starts with the right mindset. When you sing with others, whether you are part of a duet or a large choir, you immediately become part of a team. Team players pay attention to many things. Far from being consumed with their own performance, a team player looks to make sure the team is successful. Paying attention to how you can maximize everyone's ability is important. Learning how to best complement your other team members should become one of your top goals. Making sure you function "as one" is the key to having a successful team.

What does that mean on a practical level for a singer? Primarily it means learning how to listen. As part of a team, it's important that we listen intently on who we are singing with. This will help us to be able to better blend into one voice. If you are simply belting out your favorite vocal style and not paying attention to what others are doing, your voice is likely going to stick out. In order to blend with others, you have to *affect* your voice. If you aren't actively affecting your voice, then you are not blending and this leaves others to do the work of blending. Or not. When I visit churches to help with their choirs or worship teams, it's rare that I find a team that has learned the art of blending. I can typically hear each individual voice. Although they may all be singing in tune, singing the same song, they are not really singing as a team.

HOW DO I BLEND?

Blending is a learned skill. It starts with listening, as I have stated, but then moves into



matching your voice to those you are singing with. This requires being able to change your volume level, your vowel shapes, your vibrato (if necessary), your tone quality and that's not even taking into consideration the dynamics of the song, attacks and cut-offs! There is a lot involved in truly learning to blend, and to get a good blend, all the parties involved need to work at it.

Since it is so important to listen to one another, the best way to get a good blend with other singers is to sing a'capella. This will enable you to really listen and adjust without having to fight the added noise of (especially amplified) instruments. However, along with listening there needs to be a certain level of humility employed. "It's not about me" needs to be your mantra.

HARMONY AND FLEXIBILITY (ADVANCED BLENDING)

Another aspect involved with singing with others is who will sing which part? Sometimes this is easy, other times... not so much. Sometimes, believe it or not, people will hang onto their *lack of skill* to put them in a position to sing what they prefer. "Melody only" singers put upon their counterparts to always work around them. I understand that singing harmony is an acquired skill, but it is also a skill that should

be acquired if possible. That's what being on a vocal team requires: parts. Being flexible with your abilities enables everyone to have the opportunity to sing different parts and keep their voice and range healthy. Finding a good blend with someone can depend on where they are singing in their range and so being able to switch parts can often help create a much better environment for all to grow.

IN CONCLUSION

One of my daughters recently told me that, growing up in a house full of singers, she always knew what her role was and how step into it. She knew how to blend and take the harmony part that worked the best for the team. That is especially powerful since she was a brilliant soloist in her own right, going on to become a voice major in college and wonderful vocal coach following in her mama's footsteps. It is an interesting blend of skill and humility that can make a team powerful. In this way everyone's strengths are maximized and weaknesses minimized. It's a great way to make beautiful music!

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Sheri is an internationally acclaimed vocal coach. She's been helping artists and worshipers find their voice for over 40 years. For help and resources visit her site.

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