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EC62-523 Notes to a Song-Leader

Ethel Saxton

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NOTES

TO A

Song Leader

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NOTES

to a....

SONG
LEADER

By Ethel Saxton
District Supervisor, Home Agents



"A man should hear a little music, read a little poetry or see a fine picture every day of his life in order that worldly cares may not obliterate the sense of the beautiful which God has implanted in the human soul." --Goethe.

Music has long been a part of the home extension club program because members love the release from tension which comes from singing together. It is a happy way of setting a mood for a club meeting. Singing together gives club members a feeling of belonging together, and lifts their spirits. A music period which has set a relaxed and listening mood creates a friendly atmosphere for the day's program.

The music period also helps club members become familiar with great music. Singing folk songs from all over the world helps members understand people of other countries. Home songs revive childhood memories. Singing rounds and fun songs creates a joyous sense of fun. Learning contemporary and popular songs helps mothers keep up with and understand teenagers. Stirring patriotic songs leave club members with profound gratitude for their American heritage. Hymns which have been written to ease the human heart over the centuries give a feeling of the essential worth and dignity of human beings.

Music is important in a club meeting. People need not be accomplished musicians nor even sing well in order to enjoy singing. Singing together gives a sense of fellowship seldom achieved in any other way.

The Song Leader



A song leader's job is important. She does not have to be an expert musician or have a finely trained voice. However, she should be able to carry a tune, have a sense of rhythm, be able to spread enthusiasm, to enjoy a sense of fun, and to know what is appropriate. If the song leader can play a piano, it is an added advantage. Tact and genuine liking for people are very necessary qualities. If an audience seems cold, a leader must seek to win a warm response. If the group is boisterous, she can lead it into a quieter mood. There can be no music unless the group and the leader cooperate.

An enthusiastic, sparkling, witty leader who is sure of herself draws an immediate response from the group she is leading. Lack of self-confidence, unfamiliarity with the songs the group is singing, being too deliberate, and lack of planning can turn a responsive group into a dispirited one almost immediately.

Song leaders lead with voice, piano accompaniment (or any other instrument), or hands. The voice is important, but does grow tired. A person, who (without self-consciousness) can direct with her hands, gives rhythm to her direction and keeps the group in tempo. Just singing louder than the others doesn't always keep the group singing with the leader. Groups tend to slow down as they sing and to drop in pitch. If a leader leads only with her voice, the group retards her and holds her back. This is very wearing and keeps the song period from having the zip it should have.

Here are some suggestions which may help as a song leader.

Think of yourself as a leader:

- * get personal contact with group (a smile or pleasant expression).
- * keep introductory remarks at a minimum.
- * stop when you feel group has had enough.
- * finish with words of appreciation.

Reflect the spirit or mood of group:

- * encourage group to sit up and sing out.
- * keep singing "vital."
- * sing with group to keep it from lagging.

Have song books or song sheets passed out at proper time, and announce clearly the page and number of song to be sung.

Make your directing easy to follow:

- * stand where pianist and most of the group can watch you.
- * make vigorous down motion to start group singing together.
- * make cut offs as definite as attacks.
- * know the song.
- * set the tempo or speed of singing.
- * set the pitch.

Be patient and go slow on new songs:

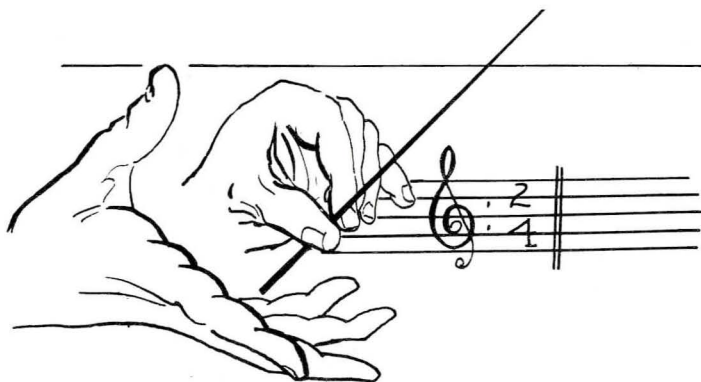
- * get participation on motion songs by also doing the motions.
- * watch phrases and not measures.
- * find some easy way to convey the effect you wish to produce.

Things to do so that group will enjoy the song period:

- * make people feel they are going to enjoy this period.
- * think ahead and always have another song ready for singing.
- * be open to suggestions for songs.
- * choose varying time signatures.
- * vary verses - solos, men and women, have group humming during solos.
- * use descants on last stanzas for added interest.
- * take time to work on difficult phrases or measures before going on.
- * correct rhythm mistakes before they become habits.

Things to avoid:

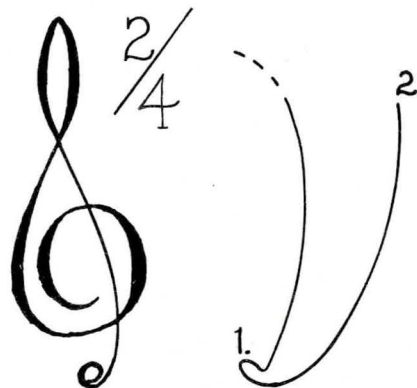
- * Do not scold. Praise is better than scolding.
- * Do not make a point with sarcasm at expense of anyone.
- * Do not shut out non-singers who can absorb and enjoy music.
- * Do not cheapen music.
- * Do not jitterbug or burlesque a song.
- * Do not jazz spirituals - keep them spiritual.
- * Do not direct songs in a worship service.
- * Watch "high standards" which could cause barriers between you and your group.
- * Do not lower standards too much either.

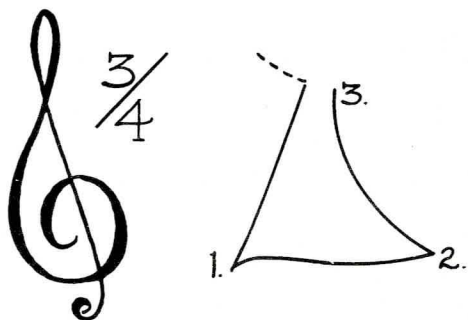


For 2/4 rhythm a vigorous down stroke of the director's hand may be used for the accented beat, and a simple up stroke for the weak beat.

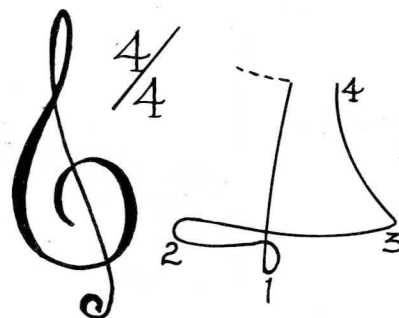
Develop Definite and Natural Conducting Movements

Although tunes appear in many combinations of high and low tones, they are all controlled by a rhythmical arrangement of accented and unaccented notes. In every song there are periods of accent or stress followed by periods of less stress. All music, as far as accent is concerned, is either two or double rhythm indicated as strong-weak or three or triple rhythm, indicated as strong-weak-weak, etc.





In 3/4 rhythm, the movements form the sides of a triangle, or strong stroke down, outward to the right then to the left, or up.



The 4/4 rhythm may be directed by the movements as shown above.



Song Sheets and Song Books

No one book has in it all the songs a group wants to sing. There are several that are excellent basic books. If money is invested in copies of the same book for every club member, music periods are limited to singing from that one book. No matter how excellent it is there will be times when the group will want to sing some other songs.

In most clubs, the song period is limited to 10 or 15 minutes and the members will probably sing in unison rather than parts. In this case, it might be better to invest in several books, and in other sheet music for the song leader and accompanist.

People can learn the melody from the song leader and the accompanist. Song sheets can be made for the music program which is planned. A song leader should save all the song sheets she gets so that she will have the words to songs when she needs them. It is important to watch copyrights. It's against the law to copy copyrighted music without permission. Be sure that everyone has a copy of the song sheet being used.

Two basic song books which might be included in your collection are: The National 4-H Club Song Book (order through your County Extension Office), and Homemakers of American Song Book. (Simmy-Birchard Publishing Co., Evanston, Illinois.)

Sometimes people like to sing familiar songs without looking at words or music. A song leader who feels the mood of her group will know when to discard the song sheets. Sometimes people need to learn new songs. With the song sheets to use as a crutch, they will not try very hard. A song leader may have to teach new songs by rote. Enunciating carefully and explaining words and phrases clearly will help a club group learn the song.



With Or Without An Accompanist

A good song leader and a good accompanist make a team that is hard to beat. However, a mediocre pianist can ruin the efforts of the song leader. Also, the group may follow the piano instead of the song leader. Some groups become dependent upon the piano and say they cannot sing without accompaniment. Some song leaders say they can lead more flexibly without an accompanist. They can set the mood and lead from one song to another more easily. This happens when a group does spontaneous table singing, or camp fire singing. It is fine when a song leader can play her own accompaniment. It is important that the accompanist know the music plans in advance of the song period.

A song leader should expect these things from an accompanist: A reasonable mastery of the instrument and ability to follow the leader in changes of mood and volume; simple performance without calling attention to herself; enough familiarity with music so that she is free to watch the leader; ability to transpose easily so that pitch will be right for the group; loyalty to leader's direction so that she will not change key unless leader asks her to do so.

If a song leader finds she has an accompanist who has definite limitations, perhaps she can use her best by choosing songs that only require a chord, or songs which can be sung a cappella. A song leader may choose a two part song or a round and ask the pianist to help lead one group of singers. She may switch to fun songs that need no accompanist. The song leader should select her own accompanist. This is better than for the club to elect one. Although the piano is the favorite instrument for accompanying, other instruments can be used, such as guitars, ukuleles, or accordians. Good singing can be done by a group if it is well planned by an enthusiastic leader, although there is no accompanying instrument.

Planning A Club Music Program

At the start of the club year, a song leader should decide what she wants to accomplish. She needs to find out from club officers how much time will be allotted to her for music. She may jot down the ideas she has for her music program and select three or four goals she feels she can accomplish during the year. A song leader may design a pattern or framework for each song period. This will depend on her personality or the way she leads, and how she likes to go from one song to another. Below is a suggestion from one song leader:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| "Something Old" | - A familiar song or songs. |
| "Something New" | - A song easily learned or a new arrangement of a well-known song. |
| "Something Borrowed" | - Folk songs from other cultures. |
| "Something Blue" | - Perhaps a love song or a ballad. |

-- Frank Walkup, Anchorage, Alaska

Another suggestion is to set up a method of classifying songs. A leader might keep a list in a notebook or file. She can glance at it and find the song she needs. Such a classification might be:

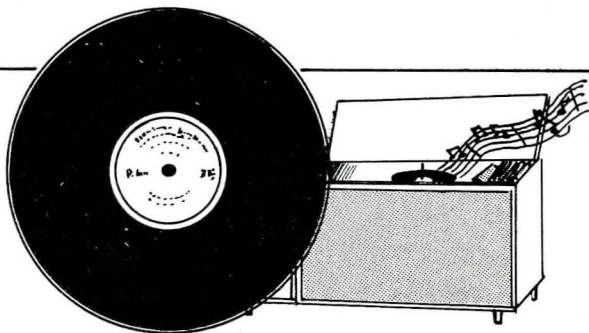
Functional	- greetings, endings, grace, etc.
Manner of singing	- rounds, motion, etc.
Mood	- sad, gay, sweet, stirring, etc.
Nonsense	- fun, nonsense sounds and syllables, etc.
Time and place	- vespers, campfire, table, hiking, etc.
Folk songs	- other countries, spirituals, etc.
Religious	- hymns, choruses, anthems, etc.

A list like this will save the leader time in selecting songs or leafing through many song sheets, and books for just the right one.

Music Leaders Handbook

One of the most useful tools for song leaders is a "Music Leaders Handbook." A song leader should collect the material that will be helpful to her. A suggested classification might be: hints on song leading; current program for club song period; previous material used for club song periods; Extension club songs; suggestions for music programs; classified song lists; song book references; music in the news; song sheet collection; musical stunts and games. A three-ring notebook is a convenient way to file the material. If a notebook does not seem to fit the situation, an expanding file will permit adding classified sections, and will be easy to carry.

If a club changes song leaders each year, each song leader should see that it is in good condition to pass on to the next leader. It then becomes the property of the club.



Music Programs

Sometimes people like to listen to music as well as to make it. Records plus solos, duets, and trios, can contribute to a listening program. This presentation can center about different kinds of themes. For example:

1. Kind of music - Lullabies
2. Season - Parade of Holidays - Christmas Music

3. Composer - Stephen Foster Songs
4. Musical plays - "The Sound of Music" - Story from which it is adapted and its songs
5. Musical pageant - "I Hear America Singing"
6. Other countries - Folk Music from specific countries
7. Home talent programs - Solos - Small vocal groups
8. Fun and games - Action songs - games and musical stunts

Recreation in Music

Music is recreation in itself. It has qualities which help those who participate to relax and to renew their spirits. In other ways music can be a source of just plain fun. Some of these activities are:

1. Singing action songs.
2. Playing games - like playing bits of well known songs on the piano and asking the group listening to identify by title and composer.
3. Divide group into two sides. One side reads a line from a song ("Where the deer and the antelope play"). The other side identifies the song ("Home on the Range"). If they can sing it they receive additional credit. The side which has the highest score is judged most musical.
4. Singing rounds.
5. Ask members to bring combs, pans, lids, clothes pins, etc. and have a kitchen band. Choose a song they all know. Don't be serious, exaggerate your directions as a leader. This is bound to be hilarious.
6. Tell a story in song - have pianist help you. As the leader comes to the name of song, play it, don't read it. With a little imagination a song leader and accompanist may work out these stories.

Small Song Groups and Choruses

The purpose of this manual is not to discuss the pleasures and pitfalls of club choruses. If there is a large enough group of singers who wish to do part singing and the director has time to practice with them it is a rewarding activity. A club could be very proud to have a triple trio or a double quartette among its membership. It is a creative activity enjoyed by both those who sing and those who listen. This gives those who have some talent in music a chance to contribute to the pleasure of their friends and neighbors.

"Just whistle a bit if the day be dark
And the sky be overcast,
If mute be the voice of the piping lark,
Why, pipe your own SMALL blasts."

--- Paul Laurence Dunbar

Books to Help:

Hand Book for Recreation Leader, Publication 231 of the Children's Bureau, U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Order from: U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 25, D.C.

How to Lead Group Singing - Helen and Larry Eisenberg

Order from: Association Press, 291 Broadway, New York 7, New York.