

DEACON-Off the Record Fall 2018

I would like to start by congratulating us for surviving so many changes and upheaval within our group. No one likes change, especially as we get older, and I wish to thank our diligent board and especially Susan Mehra for shepherding us through the past three years. I feel it is my duty to do my own small part in supporting I Cantori in my own (slightly twisted) manner by continuing our honored tradition of roasting our revered conductor. As my partner in crime Jenny wasn't able to sing with us, Nico has agreed to join me.

Therefore, we would like to welcome Cyril, in true I Cantori fashion. No conductor who graces us with their musical genius and talent can escape this deeply rooted I Cantori tradition. It would be **dishonoring** of Cyril if we neglected to honor him in true I Cantori fashion! Right? We rehearse, sitting (mainly) quietly, doing our best to follow our conductor's musical direction. It is only fair that we should have a chance to reflect back some of the wisdom we receive. I will assure you that everything we are about to say was written down word for word; at the moment it was said. We also assure you, that when we repeat those same words, completely out of their original context, they take on a whole new life and wisdom of their own. I believe this is why both Sal and Tom listened in shock; their faces clearly saying, "I didn't say *that*? I am *sure* I never would have said that! Or did I?" For over three decades we (tortured) Sal with his own words, repeated back as "Salisms". (Oddly, my spellcheck attempted to turn Salisms into Sadisms.) I fear we may have driven Tom off with only one year of his words: "Tom Foolery". Now we would like to offer the inaugural words of Cyril as "Deacon-Off the Record".

As with all new relationships, I felt us getting to know Cyril, and he becoming accustomed to us. Cyril tried to be positive, but there were a few remarks that came up over and over. I will call them, "Variations on a Theme":

The most common one was:

"Good. But let's do it again."

"Tenors, are you there? I can't hear you!"

And, "Where are my second Tenors?"

"Closer... but not really close."

"That was alright. Well, it was good."

"Altos, is that what an F sounds like? Because that was way too many notes."

"Let me hear my starting pitches...No. NO! Basses, this is your note."

"That was almost okay, but I think we all agree we can do better."

“You have to sing on tempo, but also on the right notes. If either one is wrong ... you are still wrong.”

He tried very hard to give time and guidance as well as praise in a balanced way, to the entire chorus, but sometimes he had to zero in on problem sections. To the whole chorus he said:

“Good!” ... Let’s go over that chorus again. In fact, just the Tenor and Basses.”

“Yeah. Close. But let’s try again.” (He said that A Lot.)

On Canticles we disappointed in one part of the third section:

“Okay. Kinda there...but not as much as we would like. Let’s do it again.”

On Canticles he tried to be positive, but failed:

“Okay!...more or less. Let’s have *more*, not *less*.”

We have sung in an array of languages but this term it was our songs in English that presented problems:

At one of our early rehearsals Cyril was a bit dismayed with our enunciation:

“Because it is English Americans tend to screw it up. Let me teach you how to speak English.”

He shared his heritage with us:

“Repetition is the best method, the Russian proverb says.”

Can I just say we struggled with pitch a bit this semester? And we tortured Cyril on many a night:

On the Ding Dong portion of the Susa he said”

“There is nothing so irritating as bells a little out of tune.”

On Lirum Lirum he worked with the Basses on pitch:

“You have the same note. And it’s not quite happening. Let’s try again.”

On Here We Come a Caroling:

“Fast notes have to be on pitch too.”

He also focused attention on the Altos when they had a line repeating the same note:

“How many notes are there???”

Cyril begged the choir:

“Try to anticipate your pitch. Look up!...Yeah...that wasn’t so good.”

Speaking of looking up...the notes in this case, Cyril directed us to Cyberbass to assist our learning the notes:

“Did you know Canticles is now on Cyberbass? Yes! Between Cherubini and Dvorak. A good place to be!”

After having our accompanist play the Basses their notes he said:

“Alright Basses, I don’t want you to get distracted by the other parts singing other notes.”

I found Cyril to be inventive in the ways he described our sound without being too brutal:

On Here We Come A Caroling Cyril said:

“The chords are kind of flickering. They aren’t quite there.”

On Canticles III:

“It sounds serious in the Altos and wishy-washy in the Tenors.”

On Canticles he said:

“So that’s a little muddled spot right there.”

On Oh ‘Liddle’ Town of Bethlehem Cyril said:

“The beginning was really nice but somewhere we lost our mojo.”

When we all tried to squeeze onto three risers to accommodate the orchestra, Cyril considered us and said:

“Looks funny, but sounds good.”

Cyril wanted and begged for a more rich, full, focused sound. He wanted us to be more musically aggressive:

To the men on Riu Riu, Cyril wanted more from them:

“Put your fingers on your cheekbones. This is your microphone. Let’s turn it on.”

On Here We Come a Caroling Cyril asked for many more consonants:

“Think of the *message*, ‘Here we come...caroling!’ You want to grab them by the throat [grabs by the collar and shakes]. Be aggressive!”

On Riu Riu Cyril admonished the Sopranos:

“The sound is too fluffy. I need an attack on sound.”

We had many rehearsals with our lovely soloists, Katherine and Reg. After a 30-minute soloist rehearsal with Cyril they rejoined us. Reg said:

“You thought we’d come in all bloody [he mimes a tortured face, arms out to the sides]. Cyril calmly commented:

“They’re still alive.”

There were times when our singing was frankly painful and there was no way Cyril could sugar coat it:

After hearing the Altos on Chiquiriquitin he said:
“Okaaay. That wasn’t so hot.”

And about the Alto ‘Oooo’s on Oh Mi Belen he used a metaphor:
“It is some kind of wind. But I think it is a *pleasant* wind. Not a [crosses his arms, shivers with cold]”

On the Gloria, the final Gloria chorus:
[Shuddering in pain] “That was a lot of notes... [He cut us off]... and noise.”

On Riu Riu, about the Tenors’ verse he said:
“When I was listening to the other verses I felt happy! When I was listening to your verse [pained expression] I wasn’t sure you were going to get through it.”

On Canticles I Cyril shuddered:
[Shaking his head side to side saying] “Loo Loo Loo. Tenors, that is not right.”

Susan was on very good behavior, much to my disappointment, this term, but she did slip up a few times:

To the Altos on Here We Come a Caroling:
“I invite you to enjoy that note, because it is a weird one.”

On the Susa El Rocco she asked us all:
“Guys, can you sing out so I can hear all your mistakes?”

And at our dress rehearsal Susan praised our efforts:
“For the most part the ding dongs are most effective.”

On the Belen Susan asked if there were only Tenors singing on a section, or if there were additional Baritone helpers. Seth replied:
“They don’t need no stinking Basses.”

But Cyril disagreed:

On Canticles Second Movement the Tenor line needed some additional oomph:
“Maybe some Baritones can help there cause the Tenors help the Baritones all the time.”

He also seemed to disagree about who should do the percussion of Serenissima:
“Who did the drumming last time you sang this?” We all said, “Sal.” He didn’t look jubilant, “Really? Well, that will be fun.”

Speaking of Serenissima and having fun, Gail inquired about our singing a long, sustained line:

"I'm guessing we are all staggering together."

And, of course, I seem to have an ear for things that, when repeated, just sound down right dirty:

Cyril seemed to agree, literally, on Canticles, the second movement one rehearsal, when he turned to our accompanist and said:

"It sounds a bit dirty."

At one rehearsal on Canticles he was rehearsing the men and said:

"Play the women, just to confuse the men."

The women needed instruction about pitch...at least I hope he was referring to pitch:

"Think up as you go down."

On the Gloria he admonished the men:

"If you can't get the rhythm now you won't get it." (Did he mean "Any" instead of "It"?)

On Monday Cyril told us how it was going to be:

"We are going to start with Canticles and do it with Katherine [Edison]."

On the Gloria, he was not thrilled:

"That was a little flimsy Tenors. Am I right? You are piercing something into something..." But later Cyril expressed his pleasure at the men's singing:

"Once you got into it, then you are there! Then he added, "Yeah! You came together!"

And, of course, a song, I have taken the liberty to rewrite...just a little bit:

*What shall we **bring** to our **ne-ew con-duc-tor**?*

*What can we **sing** that will **give** him **delight**?*

Don't bring** him wrong **notes** in **dis-cor-dant a-bun-dance

***Sti-ing** his **ears** with **sounds** not quite **right**.*

Bring** to him **rhy-thm** round **vowels** and pure **pi-tches

***Or he'll** say 'okay, but let's **try** it a-**gain**.*

*What shall we **do** if our **sounds** do not **ri-pen**?*

*What if we **bring** a **ca-co-phanous blight**?*

***Music** we **offer** should **always** be **perfect**.*

***For** our **con-duc-tor** our **mu-si-cal king**!*

