

## **Roast of the Conductor**

*Sarah Saxby and Jenny Paduan*

A roast of the conductor is a tradition begun years ago by Marshall Chatwin, who sadly is no longer with us. Sarah and I have kept it going, chuckling and scribbling notes in the back of the room as raw material came our way. We'd called our roasts Salisms, named for our now-retired conductor, Sal Ferrantelli. Obviously with the change at the helm of the good ship / *Cantori*, we now need a new name. We haven't settled on one yet. Could be Tom-isms, Kuhl-isms, or as Tom has professed a love of poetic words, "Kuhl Words". But we've found Tom to have a great sense of humor and hope that this roast will be taken with the good spirit in which it's intended. He's certainly supplied us with some good material.

### **Sal tried to teach us to watch him. Tom also is working on that. And he's finding it's hard to break us old dogs of bad habits:**

On tempo change in Consecrate:

"I want at least 2 bars of eyes."

Trying to help the Altos get an entrance:

"Did that work for you that time?" To which Cam replied, "I didn't actually look at you."

In Crossing the Bar:

"I want you to hold over there. I gave you a cut-off and many of you ignored me. Which was good."

### **Tom had to work with us on pitch, pronunciation, timing, and not over-singing.**

"A little softer. Listen louder."

To men:

"Sing through the vowel. I understand the word begins with a consonant and ends with 's'. You still need to sing the vowel."

Susan, to men on the O Come O Come Emanuel:

"Men, sing with round vowels so you sound like more than you are."

In the Deposit, in asking other parts not to let themselves get buried by the soprano line:

"It's sopranos and something else, I'm not sure what."

### **Tom tried to get us to be less mushy:**

To the Sopranos on the Magnificat:

"The last movement is all mushy. There's a lot of sound bouncing around in here."

To the Sopranos in the Beati Quorum:

“Make sure in that stretchy stretchy stuff you don’t bend things.”

“Sopranos, you’re being so sneaky on your quarter notes. Show me them. You’re being so subtle.”

On Camaguey:

“I don’t know the acoustics in the Mission. Hopefully it isn’t too wet for us.”

“We just want it to be that every moment there is no fudging.”

On Consecrate:

“It’s the  $\frac{3}{4}$  and the  $\frac{4}{4}$  that is making us all a little...[feet apart, swaying drunkenly] sea sick.”

On the crazy bass line in the Amens of the Sicut Erat:

“It’s like Pergolesi just fell asleep and his pencil went...” [mimes falling asleep and a pencil erratically going up and down all over the page] What is that?!”

Then, to help the men he said: “Try ‘Doo-bi-doo-bi-doo-bi-doo’ or, okay...’Scoobi-doo-bi-doo-bi-doo’.”

### **Tom is used to choirs composed of younger singers.**

To the basses:

“You have a rich sound, that’s part of your age. You don’t have to darken it.”

On Camaguey to the Altos:

“Beautiful young sound! Go home and put flowers in your hair [dances a few salsa steps]”.

On Michael Haydn’s piece, regarding the pronunciation:

On the “Nit” vs “Mit”, Gesela said it had an older colloquial pronunciation. Tom said: “I’m going with what you said. Haydn has been dead a long time.”

### **Tom wants us to believe in the music and in ourselves:**

On the Beati, to the Altos:

“It seems you don’t really believe in measure 55.”

On Camaguey:

“Altos, you don’t have a clear sense of 62...and it’s not getting clearer.”

On Magnificat:

“Basses you’re being too modest about your 8<sup>th</sup> notes.”

**He expressed hope from time to time:**

On Camaguey after months of rehearsal:

“There’s hope for this piece!”

On the Beati to the men:

“Thank you, men. I think our sectional helped. I hear the fruits of our labor. I mean...it was torturous.”

And on the men’s Dispersit:

He had them sing increasingly lighter and lighter, “Men, I know it is light, but it has a future. We can build on it. I promise I will let you sing. Just trust me for a while.”

On the Camaguey:

“There were a lot of good moments. So can we just do it again?”

In the Son de Camaguey:

“Basses started to sound more solid. The rest of you have had it all along.”

On the Zikr, regarding the tempo:

“I saw a look of terror in your eyes, but it was fun at the end!”

**And then, at times we didn’t inspire hope:**

To the men on Consecrate:

“That totally just deteriorated and died.”

On Seasons of Light:

“Tenors, can you be sure to take us there every time?”

**Sometimes it was crystal clear what he wanted:**

On Verduron (after an early run-through):

“I could see your brains going, “Oh! ‘AaaOooh!’” There are just some angles and weirdness.”

On Prayer, to the men:

“Make me shush you.”

On the Magnificat:

“Let’s go to where it gets hairy again.”

**A few comments were a little off-color**

On the Camaguey:

“Basses, don’t do your Linda...just your ‘Naaas’. I know it’s hard to pull it out.”

To Tenors and Altos:

“Just come on your next ‘Aah’!”

“Tenors, you started so good. Just come on 2.”

On the Haydn:

“Basses, warm up that E with a little lip...Give me a little lip Basses.”

On Verduron:

“Altos really good, but you need more lip on your ‘cur’. “

From Susan, in Clef Notes:

We did not get a chance to really practice how we will get off. For those of you new to I Cantori, please read the following with care. For those of you who have done this a lot, please read with care, anyway.

And Susan, at the dress rehearsal said:

“Okay, to get off [she looked over us all]...we’ll start with Suzanna.”

To which Gayle added:

“We need to know how to get on and get off. Getting on and off are different.”

To the Basses on the Sicut erat of the Magnificat:

“Back off the men.”

And also in the Sicut erat: “Altos, don’t smack the men.” And another night: “Don’t grab the men.”

**Tom could conduct with a desire for manic tempo and expression:**

On the Verduron:

“This piece has to be a little manic: [Standing with arms up over head and out, looking scared: ‘AAAAH!’ [then arms down, then up again].”

In the Sicut, when he began the movement way too fast: “That’s not maestoso, that’s a nervoso.”

On Camaguey:

“When things get weird you get loud. Don’t get crazy and climb all over me. I don’t float.”

**Tom's days are long, stretching from 5 am, through hours with hyper grade-school kids, and through our rehearsals, which I'm sure seemed agonizingly long at times.**

On the Zikr:

He was running through the pronunciation at 9:10 when he stopped and said:

"I should have done this earlier. Your brains are tired [Holding his head in his hands] I don't do Arabic after 7pm. It's in my contract."

**We put a little song together, to recognize the flexibility needed while we learn about each other.**

[Play on Solfege, ending up shooting ourselves in the head with "Ti" gesture]

*Sung to the "Flexibility" exercise:*

Fle-e-ex i bility Fle-e-ex-ibility  
Welcome our new Co-on-duc-tor  
We were sad when Sa-al left, Broken hearted and bereft  
You've helped us to sing again!  
La la la la la la  
Tra la la la...  
Fa la la la  
La la la la la!

We learned music slower than yo-ou thought a choir can  
'Scuse me please can you print this piece?  
Older voices, bad habits, we don't mean to give you fits  
For heaven's sa-ake, don't belt it out!  
[nodding at each other, German "Jah"] Yah ha ha ha ha ha ...  
yah...  
Do be do be...  
Do be do be..  
Scoobie doobie do!

Can we re-hearse at si-ix please? Tom is begging on his knees.  
By nine PM he should be in bed  
He is listing on his feet, still he doesn't miss a beat  
Let's call it quits at 9 instead.  
If by this we have offended  
Pardon, we will mend it  
So good ni-ight  
To you a-all  
La la la la lah!