

Book Review: Group Singing with Overtones (Stuart Hinds, 2020)

Reviewed by T. J. Harper, DMA

The work of Stuart Hinds, as expressed in *Group Singing with Overtones*, is more than an introduction to the technical practice and performance of overtone singing. This entry seeks to provide a macro-to-micro investigation describing specifically what overtone singing is, why it is important for modern vocalists, and most importantly, how it can be successfully achieved in group settings for non-professionals.

Stuart Hinds has provided an acerbic text which outlines a practical inventory for the experienced choral leader as well as the novice choral practitioner. Hinds is an active composer, performing musician, and teacher. His compositions incorporate electroacoustic music and a substantial portion of his output is “devoted to works featuring his unique style of overtone singing”. As a composer, Hinds has completed numerous works dedicated to the instruction and performance of solo overtone singing. In this latest effort, he has turned his attention to the instruction and underlying pedagogy at the heart of successful overtone singing by groups. Aimed to profit singers and ensemble directors alike, the construction of the overtone singing lesson is approached with a methodical keenness for technical detail as well as a realistic practicality for the learning process.

The preface of the book is the author’s overview, rationale and philosophy related to overtone singing and its place as an impactful vocal art form. Included in this overview are specific recommendations that support amateur and non-professional vocalists as well as the standard choral

ensemble.

The first full chapter, Chapter 4 is dedicated to the explication of instructional/learning objectives focused on group overtone singing. The attention to the technical foundations at the heart of proper overtone singing in this chapter create the scaffolding upon which successful overtone singing is made possible. This includes 1) voice work in warm ups: posture, breathing, phonation, and resonance; and 2) overtone singing: foregrounding overtones, and singing in unison.

The next four chapters are devoted to the deconstruction and analysis of how the instruction of overtone singing for groups can be approached. Chapter 5 takes a much-appreciated and detail-oriented look at how the first lesson in overtone singing for groups may be approached. The author prefaces this section with substantial rationale and philosophy that provide a carefully constructed roadmap to ensure group engagement and awareness. Additional semi-scripted directives and demonstrations help to fill in content gaps that may exist for the uninitiated. Chapter 6 provides valuable insights pertaining to difficulties beginning groups may experience and possible technical remedies. Chapter 7 continues to illuminate the pedagogical process through subsequent lessons with specific exercises related to the position of the soft palate, adjusting the vocal tract, external and internal physiological modifications, vocal tract adjustments with mid-low fundamentals for male and treble voices, achieving partials, and ascending/descending overtones. Chapter 8 reiterates and summarizes the rationale for overtone singing activities for groups. These activities include additional warm up strategies, pitch-matching exercises, call and response, multi-part singing, and structured improvisation. The expanded relevance in this chapter allows for additional technical strategies as well as a more supportive tone for beginning groups.

There is a wealth of practical consideration in Chapters 9 and 10 which focus on specific challenges for overtone singing found in compositions. In each case, the technical issues are further expounded upon with precision and clarity. The technical processes and practical applications of activities designed in these chapters do much to develop and expand the group's ability to produce consistent overtone singing using specific compositions by the author.

Group Singing with Overtones by Stuart Hinds proves to be much more than a convenient pocket-reference for this style of vocalism. This innovative and incisive pedagogical approach to overtone singing for groups opens the door for choral directors to provide grounded instruction for their singers regardless of ability or technical facility.

E-Book available on:

Group Singing with Overtones

Edited by Clayton Parr, USA



T. J. Harper is Associate Professor of Music, Director of Choral Activities and Chair of the Department of Music at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, CA. He conducts the University's three choral ensembles as well as courses in Conducting, Secondary Choral Methods, Applied Conducting, and Applied Voice. Dr. Harper received the Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Southern California where he graduated with honors. www.harpertj.com