

MOVING THROUGH RISER CHALLENGES

As our bodies remind us after a retreat weekend or a long rehearsal, singing and performing is a physical activity. Challenges arise in our lives, potentially impacting our ability to participate in chorus activities. What is the role of the director, musical leaders, and visual leaders and **each singer** to remain engaged and singing?

Communication:

- Determine expectations for rehearsals and performances
- Assess member needs and limitations
- Be creative in finding ways to **keep members singing** on the risers

WHAT LIMITATIONS MIGHT WE SEE?

General mobility: Resources abound for general exercise programs. Most are aimed at seniors, but are great general exercises for any age.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IETF5JRgEN8> – 7 Exercises You Should Do Absolutely Every Day - alignment

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyINAjEoTIs> Qigong for Beginner

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNtWqDxwwMg> Tai chi for Beginners

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHx3eP93Zrg> - Seated Chair Exercise Senior Workout Routines (with standing options)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROwj2dNcL6c> – Seated Hip Exercises for Seniors

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLSFVV0UIM&list=PLRCgg2aTq5NWjbav8TVXatCRijJlWuUOM> – Seated Chair Exercises Senior Workout Routines - for those with limited mobility

Balance/stability: Balance and steadiness issues often have more to do with strength than anything else. Strengthening muscles that improve stability and core strength are the biggest help to improving balance.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-tUHuNPStw> Balance Exercises for Seniors - Fall Prevention

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8uLqba82IY> – Senior Elderly Easy Fitness Balance Strength Coordination Vestibular Exercise

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNC4bi3Ucac> - Seven Balance Exercises for Seniors - Fall Prevention

Poor circulation: Activity is often the best remedy for poor circulation. Standing can present problems for those who have impaired circulation. Some people may choose to wear compression stockings. Simply getting off the risers and walking around may be the best bet. If there is swelling, elevate the feet for a while before returning to standing position. Ankle pumps and ankle circles help pump fluids and blood from the distal parts of the legs.

<https://www.silversneakers.com/blog/4-exercises-improve-poor-circulation/>

<https://www.livestrong.com/article/536991-leg-circulation-exercises-while-sitting/>

Amputation:

Upper extremity: may prefer to position the singer with her residual limb toward the outside since we do more moves with our “outside” arm. But really, it doesn’t matter. Body position, attitude, and facial expressions are far more important.

Lower extremity: if she has a prosthesis, she may prefer to use a stool or chair, or she may prefer to stand with or without a standing frame. If the singer has a prosthesis, be aware that she cannot feel where the prosthetic foot is; “hanging ten” may be unsafe for this member. Ask which side of the risers would most beneficial for her.

Neuropathy: Those with neuropathy often have decreased sensation and awareness of joint position which can affect balance. Because of the decreased awareness of foot position, “hanging ten” may be unsafe for these singers. Exercise possibilities for those with neuropathy:

<https://www.foundationforpn.org/living-well/lifestyle/exercise-and-physical-therapy/>

Visually impaired: Be sensitive to how much physical assistance the member wants. Teaching choreo to a blind member may take some creative thinking.

- Ask what she needs to be successful
- Provide verbal instruction
- Have her feel body positions on another singer
- Ask if it’s okay to touch her to guide her positioning
- May benefit from individual instruction initially

PHYSICAL RISER AIDES

Some singers may require a physical aid in order to participate in chorus rehearsals and/or performances. In general, use the least amount of assistance needed while keeping all members safe. No matter what physical aid is used, always ensure that good alignment for singing and performing can be achieved.

Safety: ensure that the user is physically able to use the aide. If there is any instability, try another device with more support. No member should be put at risk – the member using the device, members setting up the device, or members who stand near the device.

Liability: ensure that the chorus is not liable should an injury result from using any equipment. Those with a disability should be offered reasonable accommodation in order to permit participation in performances. All members need to check with their physician before starting any exercise program.

Physical riser aids:

Singing Mat

- Provides cushioning when standing for extended periods
- Improves kinesthetic awareness, reduces tension

<https://www.studioupbeat.com/store/c4/SingingMat.html>

Box/platform

- Ideal for members who are short in stature
- Can be moved easily on the risers or for flat floor performances

Standing frame

- “Riser buddy” or equivalent
- Ensure that it is securely fastened and does not allow side to side or forward and backward movement
- Ideal for members who are mobile, but have balance issues. They can stand and perform choreo with this balance assist.
- Riser Buddy contact: sweetad_57@yahoo.com

Stool

- Evaluate sitting position to ensure good alignment while singing
- Swivel or no?
- Foot support – may rest feet on riser or on crossbar
- Many options available
- Ideal for members who have difficulty standing for long periods
- Allows singers possibility of alternating sitting and standing
- Easy transport and set up
- Ensure stability of the stool – adding a platform to the bottom can prevent the legs from slipping off the riser

Riser chair

- Evaluate sitting position to ensure good alignment while singing
- Swivel – allows changes in body angles for choreo
- Provides back support
- Foot support – important for singer’s stability and for swivel function
- Ideal for members who are able to get up onto the risers to get into the chair and are unable to stand to perform, even for short periods
- Ensure that the chair is firmly secured to the risers
- Difficult to locate new commercially made riser chairs for purchase

Wheelchair

- Observe sitting position to encourage good alignment while singing
- Ideal for members who are non-ambulatory
- Needs to be positioned on the floor
- Other considerations:
 - How agile is the user?
 - Can they participate in choreo or do they need to be stationary?

Service dog

Rehearsal vs. performance:

- Need a device to rehearse, but not perform?
 - Rehearse without the stool, chair, etc.
 - Encourage standing as much as possible
- Singers require a physical aide for performances without risers
 - Stools, chairs, standing frames all need to function on a flat floor.
- Sitting in a regular chair for rehearsal is not ideal.
 - Sitting in a regular chair puts the singer on a lower level than other performers, changing chorus sound
 - Requires positioning on the floor
 - Does not lend itself to promote proper alignment for singing.

REHEARSALS:

- Each member needs to find a way to participate on the risers
- Director and visual team work with members who have challenges
- Singers don’t sit out. They are a part of the chorus.

Physical warmups:

- ALL MEMBERS PARTICIPATE IN PHYSICAL WARMUPS.
- Incorporate balance activities/one legged activities in warmup routine
- Offer modifications for those who cannot perform a particular move
- Encourage participation from everyone. Those who often opt out are the ones who need the warmup the most.

General considerations for those with physical disabilities:

- Respect the *person* and see them beyond their disability.
- Don't make assumptions about the person or their disability.
- Ask. Ask before jumping in to help. Ask what they need. Ask how you and the chorus can contribute to their success.
- Ask yourself is there is a need to point out the disability.
- Be aware of personal space. Consider a wheelchair as an extension of the person. Don't lean on or move a mobility aid. If you wouldn't push the person, don't push the wheelchair unless you have been specifically asked to assist.
- Don't grab or lead people by the arm. Offer your arm if needed. Many people need their arms to balance or to use their assistive device. Don't lift people by their arms.
- Speak normally. Unless the person is hearing impaired, you don't need to talk louder.
- Observe your language. Don't use negative terms (victim of, afflicted with, stricken with, crippled, wheelchair bound)
- Use 'person first' language if appropriate.
- Don't use made up words: handicapable, differently abled. Sometimes words like "differently abled" may seem patronizing, and although intentions might be noble, the language is often not well received.

Judges' perspective:

We have misperceptions about how we'll be judged in contest if we have members who are on stools or walkers or canes or in wheelchairs. Judges care way more about ***how we sing and how we communicate the message of the songs*** than if we need help to be on the risers.

- Preference of location of wheelchairs, walkers, riser chairs, etc.
 - o Do what works for your chorus.
 - o Don't separate members from the chorus or place them off to the side
 - o Can those with walkers use a stool or standing frame on the risers?
 - o Center position may be the best choice if the singer using a wheelchair does not participate in choreo. If she is included in the front row choreo, place her where her voice is best suited to the chorus sound.
- Focus on facial expressions and selling the lyrical message of the song.

Our challenge: Going forward, instead of excluding people from participating, can we look for ways to make it work? There is nearly always a solution. Be creative. Experiment. Ask for advice, starting with the member with the challenge. Our goal is to keep people singing. What and YOU do? How can YOU help?

