

# GIVE IT LIFE

Paul Holley

*“The greatest respect an artist can pay to music is to give it life.” Pablo Casals*

Have you ever attended a concert where you were amazed at the music that was created and inspired by the performers and their involvement in their music making? Or one where little attention was paid to the composer’s intentions and you wondered whether the performers had any connection to the music. No doubt you have experienced both scenarios. I have heard choristers say, on occasions, that in performance their main aim is just to sing the right notes at the right time with the right text. If they do that they will have given a successful performance. I am sure that the performers in the concert you thought of in the first scenario did far more than just play or sing the right notes at the right time. To look beyond the notes on the page is what Pablo Casals is referring to in his statement above.

Music is more than the words and dots on the page and that mastering the mechanics of them alone does not make music. The psychologists tell us that our brain has two sides - the left is the more academic or analytical side and the right the more artistic or interpretative side. I think that, sometimes, as performers we fail to use our whole brain.

Choristers have an advantage over instrumentalists when it comes to interpretation because we most often have text to communicate. Along with the melody it determines the phrase length and the peaks within the phrase. I often ask my choristers to read the text dramatically and imagine when they are singing that they are trying to communicate that poetry in the same way they might in a dramatic performance. To sing like that requires taking the risk of demonstrating emotional connection. As singers, then, we need to determine the degree of vulnerability that we will allow ourselves to express to our audience. As singers there is often nothing between us and our audience – no instrument to hide behind

Our art form, choral music, is an academic art form but it is also an expressive art form and so I encourage you to contemplate taking a risk and allowing yourself to express the text and music in the song you are performing if it calls for it, not at the expense of accuracy but to enhance it. Be emotive, let the audience see you are connected with the music you are performing. It doesn’t require a dance routine, excessive swaying or over the top facial expressions just a connection. Tom Carter in his book ‘Choral Charisma’ quotes the ancient Hindu proverb: *What comes from the mouth goes to the ear, but what comes from the heart goes to the heart.*

As we go about our music-making I trust it will be with a view to putting as much of ourselves into our performances and exploring the musical possibilities of the songs we rehearse and perform.

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