

**“Painting with Sound”:  
Placement of Voices within the Choral Ensemble  
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*Acoustical placement of voices within the ensemble is a key component for intonation, blend and overall beauty of choral tone and enjoyment of singing for individual singers. Listening to individual voices and placement within the choir can change the overall tone of the choir. This session will provide an overview of various choral arrangements used by various conductors, as well as a focus on placement of individual voices (utilizing session participants) in order to discover possible ways of achieving a more homogenous tone (blended tone), better intonation and encourage improved choral sound.*

**1. ‘Compatibility’ Placement**

**A. Considerations in Working with Tone Colors (Timbre)**

- 1. Subjective – Conductor’s Preference**
- 2. Stylistic Implications – Dictated by the music**
- 3. Vocal Ease and Compatibility**
- 4. Vocal Health (always a consideration in either type of placement)**

**B. ‘Painting’ with sound within the section – listening to individual voices and using them to ‘color’ the section and overall tone. – Weston Noble’s methodology**

<https://archive.org/details/ChoralBlend2005/Demonstration+at+Westminster+Conducting+Institute.mkv> (Accessed July 4, 2024).

**C. Gackle Premise: Voices are like Magnets - “Unlike” voices attract; “like” voices sometimes repel (affecting tone and blend), i.e., bright, pure voices “attract breathier, lighter voices.**

**D. Blend - Pairing voices of different timbers within the section (unlike voices), ultimately yields more homogenous tone.**

**2. ‘Spatial’ Placement – Acoustical space between singers has positive effects on overall tone, fullness of sound, blend, and intonation. (Daugherty, J., 1996, 1999)**

**A. Auditors significantly favored circumambient spacing for female singers and lateral spacing for male singers.**

**B. Singers (100%) consistently and significantly preferred spread spacing and attributed to it improved vocal production and ability to better hear both self and ensemble. Results suggested that choir spacing made a greater contribution to choral sound preferences of both listeners and choristers than did choral formation.**

## Choral Formations/Arrangements from Various Conductors

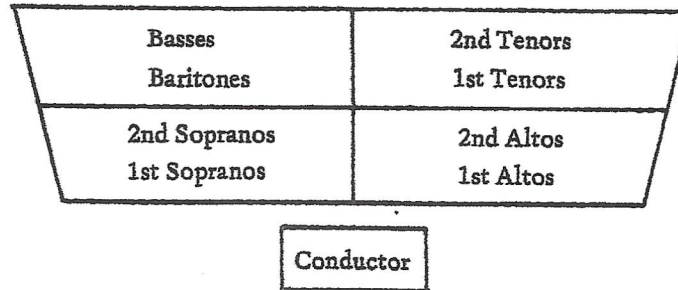
### F. Melius Christiansen (1871-1955)

St. Olaf Choir

(58 singers, 18 sopranos, 15 altos, 11 tenors and 14 basses)

**BLEND** was always the priority

Vocal color: Bright/dark voices



### John Finley Williamson (1887-1964)

Westminster Choir College

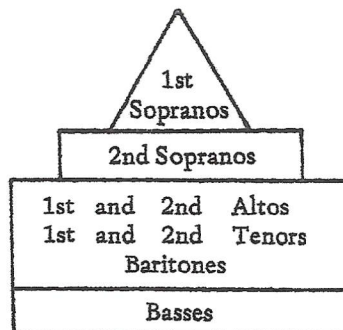
40 voices

5 first sopranos, 5 second sopranos, 5 first altos, 6 second altos

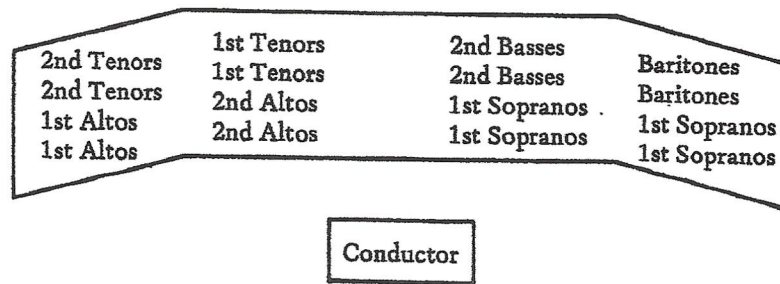
4 first tenors, 4 second tenors, 5 baritones and 6 basses

Concept of balance of tone similar to a "New England church":

Emphasis on a strong foundation of the bass section with the first sopranos as a "glistening point of the spire."



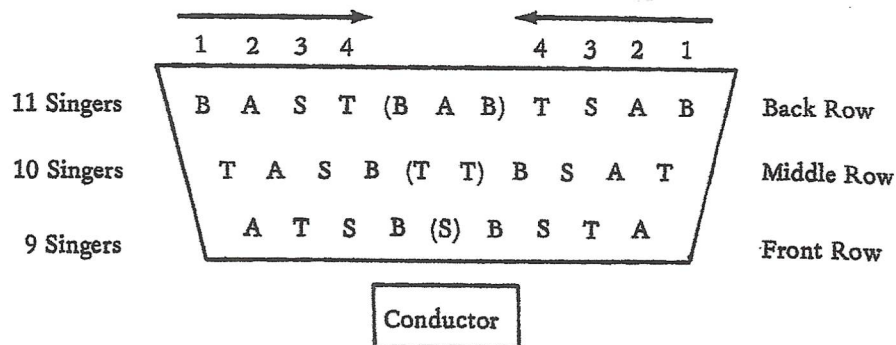
To achieve this sound, the performing arrangement was basically sectional in orientation:



## Robert Shaw (1919-1999)

### Robert Shaw Chorale

Usually consisted of 7 quartets plus 2 extra singers with voices arranged in a 'mirror fashion':



- 1) Each singer usually had a 4-foot area between themselves and singers on the right, left, back and front.
- 2) Strongest voices in the rear of the choir.
- 3) Backrow: Quartet on either end in mirror (B, A, S, T) with two Basses and Alto in Center (B, A, B)
- 4) Middle Row: Quartet on either end in mirror (T, A, S, B) with two tenors in the center
- 5) Front Row two quartets in Mirror (A, T, S, B) and a soprano in the center
- 6) The arrangement of the quartets in each row was different
- 7) Flexibility achieved by 2 Baritones who could sing T2 and 2 Altos who could sing S2.
- 8) Amateurs – Men in Center, Sopranos on the left and Altos on the Right

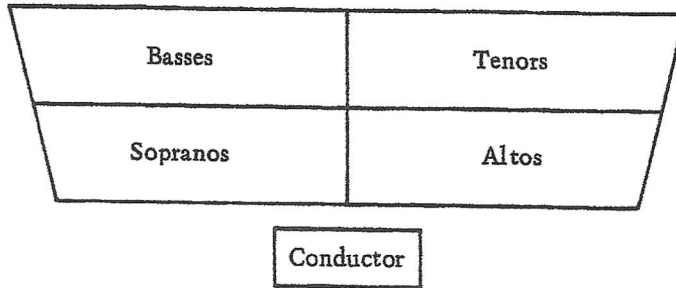
# Norman Luboff (1917-1987)

Norman Luboff Choir

30 singers – 16 men and 14 women

Block formation is optimum for a concert choir;

On occasion, they performed with men in the middle, sopranos stage right, altos stage left; tenors between basses and sopranos

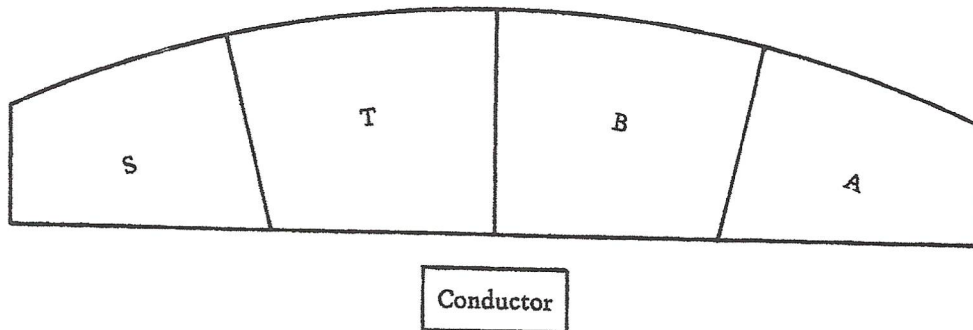
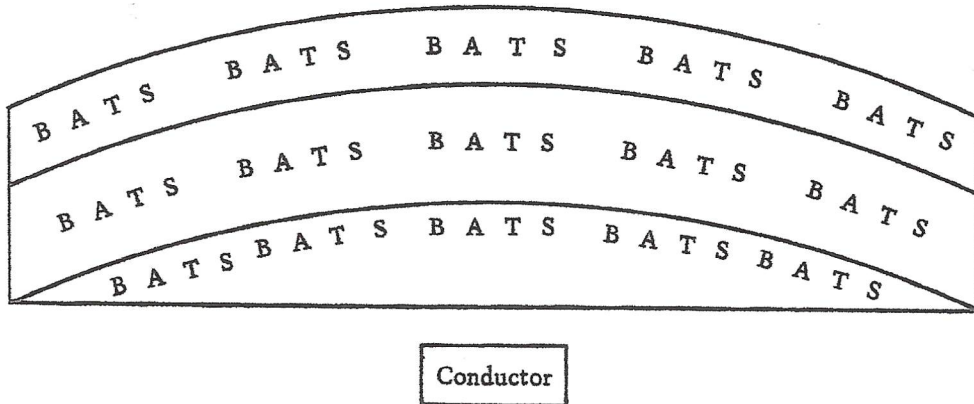


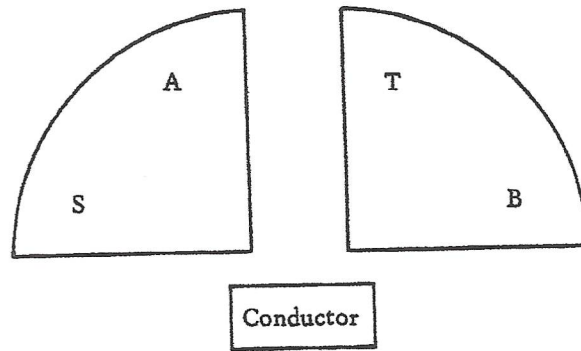
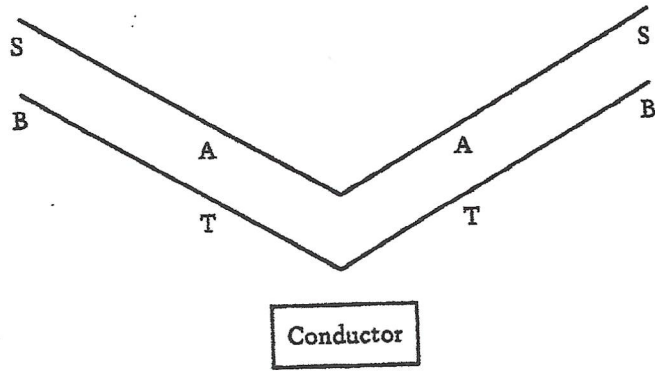
# William D. Hall (1934 – 2023)

William Hall Chorale (Chapman College/William Hall Chorale)

Changed formations 3 – 4 times during concert

Reasons: Musical style considerations and visual variety





**Weston Noble (1922-2016)**

**Luther College (Nordic Choir)**

**Partnering (opposites); Compatibility /Vocal Ease; Vertical Placement**

**Orchestral Colors – Blend (Reed, Flute, Brass, etc.)**

**Bass 1 Tenor 1**

**Bass 2 Tenor 2**

**Soprano 1 Alto 2**

**Soprano 2 Alto 1**

**Treble Voices/Developing Voices**  
**“Light Voices Repel, Unlike Voices Attract” – L. Gackle**

**Unison Formation**

**Light-Breathy/Heavier-pure**  
**(Duet-type formation)**

**LHLHLHLHLHLHLHL**  
**LHLHLHLHLHLHLHL**  
**LHLHLHLHLHLHLHL**

**SA Formation, Two-Part, Equal Voiced Formations**

**SOPRANOS ALTOS**  
Conductor

**DUET FORMATION**  
**SASASASASASASASA**  
**SASASASASASASASA**  
**SASASASASASASASA**  
Conductor

**SOPRANO**  
**ALTO**  
Conductor

**SOPRANO ALTO**  
**ALTO SOPRANO**  
Conductor

**SSA/Three-part Formations**

**Soprano 1 Alto Soprano 2**  
Conductor

**Soprano 1 Alto Soprano 2**  
Conductor

**Soprano 1 Soprano 2 Alto**  
Conductor

**Alto Soprano 2 Soprano 1**  
Conductor

## **SSAA Formations**

**Soprano 1   Alto 2   Alto 1   Soprano 2**  
Conductor

**Soprano 1**  
**Alto 2   Alto 1   Soprano 2**  
Conductor

**Alto 2**  
**Soprano 1   Alto 1   Soprano 2**  
Conductor

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**Lynne Gackle, 2024**