

Further to a piece presented in Euronote back in 2001, the following has been extracted from RSCM information and presents the newly published revised scheme and introduces the new single all embracing *Voice for Life* publication [available, via RSCM music direct, from early Jan'04 - and is to be recommended to all involved in the scheme or just generally wishing to advance their general skills in their involvement in choral activities ...]

**Introduction:**

*Voice for Life*: The Royal School of Church Music's acclaimed **guide** to training choirs and singers of all ages. The *Voice for Life* scheme provides a framework for choral singers to develop their vocal skills, their musical understanding and their knowledge of repertoire.

**The completely revised and up-dated Voice for Life:**

A structured guide to vocal training

Based on graded targets with informal assessment

Complete with supporting resources to enable teachers and choir trainers to deliver the programme with confidence

Designed for use in schools, churches and other community choirs

Easy to use with clear layout

Fully compatible with the RSCM Bronze, Silver & Gold Awards

Soon to be available for the first time in a single volume from January 2004.

**How does the new edition of *Voice for Life* work?**

There are four levels in the *Voice for Life* scheme providing training for beginners through to advanced singers. These four levels are designed for use by singers of **any age**. A child may start at the first level and gradually work through all four levels. An adult singer would work through exactly the same levels.

Starting at the first level (for beginners) the *Voice for Life* levels are as follows:

Light Blue

Dark Blue

Red

Yellow

**How do singers progress through these levels? How do I assess my singers?**

Each level of *Voice for Life* comes complete with:

**Teaching material** in the Choir Trainer's book to enable the teacher or choir trainer to provide the appropriate training for each level.

**Clear targets** which state exactly what a singer should have achieved and be able to demonstrate in order to complete each level.

**Singer's workbooks** containing questions, exercises and puzzles. There are **four** workbooks: one for each level of *Voice for Life*. Each workbook is designed for use by adults and children alike. On completion, the workbook is signed and dated by the choir trainer.

**Ribbons and medals/lapel badges** to award singers on completion of each level. For school choirs and other community choirs, there are coloured lapel badges: Light Blue, Dark Blue, Red and Yellow. For church choirs and other robed choirs, medals can be worn on the appropriately coloured ribbon.

Each level of the *Voice for Life* scheme is assessed informally by the choir trainer. Once a singer has completed the necessary training for that level, reached the targets and finished the workbook, the choir trainer awards them their badge, and/or ribbon and medal. The singer then moves onto the next level.

**What kind of training does Voice for Life provide?** Each level of the scheme provides training in the following areas:

### **Module A: Using the voice well**

This module aims to teach singers how to develop good vocal technique. It contains many practical exercises and helpful diagrams enabling the choir trainer to deliver the training in this module with confidence. It begins by helping singers get used to the physical sensations of healthy vocal technique, and in the later levels develops their understanding of the physiology of the voice.

*Contained in this module:* Posture, breathing, tone & range, diction, style & interpretation, blending with the choir, a troubleshooting guide.

### **Module B: Musical skills & understanding**

Musical skills and musical understanding should grow together; as singers make progress with their voice they need to develop the understanding and skills to support them in their singing. Singers need to understand the music they are looking at and develop an ability to read and interpret what they see. Likewise, they need to develop their listening skills. This module develops knowledge of music theory and notation, and then encourages singers to demonstrate this understanding through sight-singing and aural skills.

*Contained in this module:* music theory (note values, note names, time signatures, key signatures, rests, accidentals, intervals, modes, chords and cadences), sample sight-reading tests, sample aural tests.

### **Module C: Repertoire**

This module aims to develop a good understanding of the musical and historical contexts of the music performed by the choir or individual singer. It also gives singers the opportunity to demonstrate the musical understanding they gain in Module B through some simple musical analysis. Singers are encouraged to explore the music that they sing: to translate and understand the text of a piece, to look at the historical background, to look at the purpose of a piece, to develop an understanding of the style/genre. Through this research, singers develop the ability to gather information from various sources and to present this in an original form.

*Contained in this module:* finding the information, sample questions, sample answers, acknowledging sources, how to write programme notes, programming for your choir – basic principles.

### **Module D: Belonging to the choir**

If a singer wants to be part of a choir, there is more required than simply being able to sing. There are issues of commitment, punctuality and responsibility. This module considers how a singer can be encouraged in these areas and gives plenty of additional advice for the choir trainer on recruiting singers into the choir and how to maintain their interest and commitment.

*Contained in this module:* recruiting and publicity, new singers in the choir, when a singer moves into the adult section, when singers leave the choir, roles of responsibility in the choir, choir pay, child protection, copyright issues, discipline, general progress, weekly standards, notes for your head chorister.

### **Module E: Choir in context**

A choir does not exist in isolation. Although it is a community in its own right, it is also part of a wider community such as a school, church, village or town. *This module encourages singers to explore the wider context of its choir's existence:* why do they sing in that particular choir? why does the choir exist? for whom does it sing? how does the choir benefit its members and those outside the choir? The material is divided into various sessions, each based on one topic, and these come complete with photocopiable worksheets.

*Contained in this module:*

***For all choirs:*** the gift of music, the power of music, what is a community? the community of our choir, the wider community, the roots of our choir, the changing repertoire of our choir, special project: serving the wider community.

***Additional sessions for church and worship choirs:*** Christian ministry and music, regular and special services, festivals and seasons in the Christian year, places of worship (church buildings).

**Appendix:** *advice and specialist training:* boys' changing voices, the counter-tenor voice, girls' developing voices, suitable repertoire for each level

## **The Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards**

**What are the Bronze, Silver and Gold awards?** In order to support the choir trainer and affirm the *Voice for Life* levels achieved within the choir, the RSCM provides a complementary system of awards designed to be assessed through formal examination: the Bronze, Silver and Gold awards. Each award has its own syllabus and regulations. These come complete with guidelines to help prepare the candidate and the choir trainer for the standard expected during the examination. Successful candidates are entitled to wear a prestigious medal cast in the appropriately coloured metal (bronze, silver or gold) and these are worn on distinctive ribbons. Bronze awards are worn with a Green ribbon, Silver awards with a Purple ribbon and the Gold award with a Dark Red ribbon.

**Where can I get hold of the syllabus for these awards?** In the UK and NW Europe [soon to have its own validated examiners], the Bronze and Silver awards are administered and examined on a local basis by a voluntary network of RSCM committees. Every local RSCM committee has its own syllabus for the Bronze and Silver awards. Although the syllabuses differ from area to area, the RSCM has validated all Bronze and Silver award syllabuses to ensure an even standard across the countries. All examiners for the Bronze and Silver awards have also been validated by the RSCM to ensure consistency of marking. If you do not know who your local RSCM representative is, please contact Martin van Bleek. For a list of validated syllabuses, access the RSCM website. The Gold award is administered from the RSCM central office. The examinations are arranged for June and November each year with entry deadlines of 1 May and 1 October respectively.

**Where do these awards fit into the *Voice for Life* scheme?** The *Voice for Life* scheme and the Bronze, Silver and Gold awards are designed to fit together. They should be attempted in the following order:

Light Blue, Dark Blue, **Bronze award**  
Red, **Silver award**  
Yellow, **Gold award**

In effect, the *Voice for Life* scheme provides training and preparation for the Bronze, Silver & Gold Awards; Light Blue and Dark Blue help a candidate prepare for the Bronze Award, Red level helps a candidate prepare for the Silver award, and Yellow level helps a candidate prepare for the Gold award. Likewise, the Bronze, Silver and Gold awards affirm each of the *Voice for Life* levels that have been awarded informally by the choir trainer.

**What if I have a singer who does not want to take the external (Bronze, Silver and Gold) examinations?** This is no problem. The *Voice for Life* scheme can be used on its own to provide training and motivation to singers within a choir. There is no need to take the Bronze, Silver and Gold awards if your singer is unhappy about undertaking such a formal assessment.

**I have heard about the Dean's and Bishop's Awards. Are these the same as the Bronze and Silver Awards?**

The Dean's and Bishop's awards existed long before the Bronze and Silver awards and in the same way as Bronze and Silver, these were administered and examined on a local basis by a voluntary network of RSCM committees. Most local RSCM committees had their own syllabus for the Dean's and Bishop's awards. In order to achieve a consistent standard around the country without destroying the integrity and individuality of each syllabus, each committee was invited to submit its syllabus for validation. Syllabuses were examined by the RSCM Awards Validation Group and validated after negotiation with the local committee. Under the validation scheme areas can either call their new validated awards 'Bronze' and 'Silver', or they can opt to keep the original names of their awards (e.g. Dean's and Bishop's). However, even if an area opts to use a different name for their awards, the syllabus will indicate that it has been validated at Bronze or Silver standard.

**If the names of the syllabuses are different, how do I know if a syllabus has been validated by the RSCM?**

All the validated syllabuses that are using a different name (the most common being Dean's or Bishop's) state clearly that they have been validated by the RSCM. Dean's awards are validated at Bronze standard and Bishop's awards are validated at Silver standard. You can also check the RSCM website for a list of validated syllabuses to date. Many of these syllabuses are available for you to download, complete with an application form. Staff at the RSCM central office will also be able to advise you on the areas that offer validated syllabuses.

**What do I do if my own local area syllabus is not RSCM validated?** The RSCM will provide a validated examiner for any candidate who would like to be examined on an RSCM validated syllabus. In most cases this means that a candidate will be examined by a neighbouring area already running a validated awards scheme.

**Who should I contact if I have any further questions about *Voice for Life* or the Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards?** Further advice and information is available from the Assistant Warden:

Leah Perona-Wright, Tel: +44 (0)1306 872800, Email: [lperonawright@rscm.com](mailto:lperonawright@rscm.com)

**Where can I purchase the *Voice for Life* materials?** The *Voice for Life* materials are available from: RSCM Music Direct, Cleveland Lodge, Westhumble, Dorking RH5 6BW Tel: +44 (0)1306 872811 Email: [musicdirect@rscm.com](mailto:musicdirect@rscm.com)

Please note: The new revised *Voice for Life* edition, including Singer's Workbooks, will be available from January 2004. Customers who choose to purchase any of the existing *Voice for Life* programmes (1-5) before this time will not be entitled to a refund on these products when the new edition is published in January.