

Teams; or, Singing Together as Metaphor for Inter-Personal Action

Description

My favorite comic book was X-Men, and all the related comics. (I used to read/collect comics. Deal.) One of the things I liked about these particular titles is also exemplified in a [fight sequence](#) from the movie "[The Incredibles](#)." It's not that the individual members of the X-Men team were more powerful than the foes they faced. It's that when they trained, they practiced ways to use each members' individual strengths to best advantage.

As in, suppose one day that the team has a strong, impervious metal-man, a flyer, and a telekinetic. The flyer isn't going to carry the metal man to the foe; the metal man is too heavy. So maybe the telekinetic uses his/her mind to throw debris at the foe, occupying him/her while the metal man closes in; the unencumbered flyer can dodge attacks. But if, on another day, you have a lithe martial arts master in your team instead of the metal man, the flyer can rapidly carry him/her to the foe, while the telekinetic protects them by mentally deflecting the foe's attacks.

The team was practiced at working well together, using the unique abilities of whoever was on the team at the moment, adjusted according to whomever else was on the team; in concert, and in ways tailored to whatever foe or challenge they had to face.

Musical Teams er, Groups

I have a similar experience when I'm singing in a group, especially an Improv Choral Group. (No, I'm not telekinetic.) And I suspect it's also true of string quartets, [woodwind quintets](#), and [brass quintets](#); I know I've experienced it in [Jazz quartets](#) as well. But let's take the case of the choir or choral group, specifically one where each member improvises the parts they sing. (The example will generalize just fine.)

The first singer will come up with something, and (if they're "doing it right") it will be something that's true to who and what they are in that particular moment. A unique singer's unique answer to the lack-of-music that existed in the unique moment just before they started.

The second singer will then also come up with something, their unique answer to the sound that the first singer is making. At this point, both of these singers are involved in something of a paradox. The two parts have to work well together, so the two singers have to subordinate their individual voices to the sound they're co-creating. At the same time, the parts (and, in turn, the singers) rely on one another, so each singer needs to stand strong in the part they've made, so that the other can depend upon it.

A third singer joins in, sounding their unique answer to the texture woven by the first two, each of the three standing strong in their own part but fitting it in with the sound they're creating together. A final singer, the "soloist" for this example, sings a different kind of part that behaves differently, but again everyone stays strong with their individual contribution while making sure it's in service to the overall

sound.

Maybe the first singer is good at Celtic and Bluegrass, and was feeling aggressive. Maybe the second singer is funky and agile, and was feeling wistful. Maybe the third singer has a particular knack for harmony, and a yen for changing notes at surprising moments. And maybe the combination inspired the soloist, who might be good at being lyrical and contemplative, to explore what they might have to say with an angular melody containing spacious pauses.

Whatever the case, each part will be utterly unique, but at the same time must be perfectly in sync with what the other parts are doing. Any of the parts alone might be fine, but are nowhere near as meaningful as when they work together. The parts need the whole, just as the whole needs the parts.

Sing um, Do Your Part

So it is with people in general and the things that we do when we work together, or simply interact. Every one of us is unique.

I'll say that again: every one of us is unique.

I've thrown around the word "unique" a lot in this article, considering that there are over 7 billion people on the planet at the moment and there have been [over 100 billion people since the dawn of humanity](#). And yet I'll stick to that assertion. No-one approaches living life in quite the way that you do, and no-one ever has.

So, anything that you undertake, you will do in your own unique voice. And if you undertake something *with* someone else, you'll each have your own approaches, strengths, and challenges. Working toward your shared goal, you'll depend on the contribution of the other, and you'll need to stand strong with the contribution that you yourself must make.

Were you to work alone, your actions might have an effect. But your actions in concert with the actions of others, working towards the same ends, will have greater effects.

But again, the paradox: to work best, everybody's individual efforts should be focused on the common end, but at the same time, everyone on the team must value the different, highly individual contributions of each team member.

I even think that the time I've spent singing has helped teach me how to do this better in non-singing environments. How about you — is there anything you've learned making music that you've applied to your extra-musical life?

Category

1. Uncategorized

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Author

amado