

See the flowers bloom

Kathy Geiss sat out of rehearsal last evening and made an important observation: as ensemble members, you are not watching the conductor closely enough, your eyes are too often buried in the music. This produces ragged ensemble, that is, not singing together with precision and is the cause for my frequent complaints. As I explained, watching the conductor is usually done with *peripheral* vision, not direct eye contact, which although helpful at critical spots, is not required. I do not need adoring choral singers looking directly at me; what I want is tight ensemble.

Tight ensemble singing requires, demands that you know your music well enough to perform, not just to get by, not just so that you don't sing in the rests. The first rule is NOT "do no harm" but rather to sing well, to contribute to the making of beautiful music with the ensemble. Knowing your music well may require partial memorization.... but not complete. I have almost never seen/heard professional choral singers perform by memory because they have learned to sing skillfully with music in their hands. Doing so saves rehearsal time and allows for performance of extremely difficult repertoire. In my view, memorization is more often needed by amateurs—who have the luxury of an abundance of rehearsal time and actually may benefit from memorized performance.

Are we, the SG Chamber Singers, amateurs or professionals? Being paid for services does not guarantee professionalism; rather how we perform, how quickly we read the score, respond to the conductor, how quickly we pick up phrasing, pitches and rhythms, dynamics, etc. and RETAIN what we have learned. Perhaps we are at an awkward spot between amateurism and professionalism: neither fish nor fowl, neither hot nor cold. Perhaps we don't know who we are?

I suggest that you choose to be professional! Learn your music thoroughly and watch the conductor ALL OF THE TIME with peripheral vision.... and see the flowers bloom.