

**FOR NAPERVILLE CHORUS -- DEVELOPING ENSEMBLE UNITY THROUGH COUNT-SINGING**  
**by Peter Jarjisian (January 1, 2025)**

Composer, Alice Parker, had encouraged me, "Just teach them what you love, and everything will be fine." So, here we go! ☺ Count-singing facilitates togetherness. By focusing on the element of TIME, each singer is challenged to *think* with, and *listen* to, fellow singers. Count-singing amplifies our attention to the "when" in the music. Intonation tends to improve, too, as the singer reinforces the pitch by moving breath through each division of the beat.

We're able to feel an underlying "current" inside the notation. It may be the equivalent of what a drummer might be playing, or a guitar player might be strumming. For "simple meters" (like 2/4, 3/4, 4/4), we count the eighth-notes in each quarter-note of time as (1 &, 2 &, etc.). In "compound meters" (like 6/8, 9/8, or 12/8, we count the eighth-notes as (1 & a, 2 & a, etc).

Using simple division, when we *see* a whole-note, we think: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &, propelling the tone through the beat divisions -- through the eighth notes. **Just *thinking* the beat division gives *life* to the music.**

**EMBRACING THESE SUBTLETIES WILL HELP US**

- For beat 3, say "T" instead of "three". It takes less time than using the "thr."
- Shade your singing of the word "and" toward "in". The vowel in the word "in" is narrow; it will contribute to the linear, legato quality we're seeking. What's more, the "n" will help develop attention to voiced consonants.

Compare: 1-and, 2-and, three-and, 4-and                    to                    1-in, 2-in, T-in, 4-in

- **Phrasing & Breathing:** At the **end** of a phrase, it makes sense to replace the last number (or &) with a breath. For example, when count-singing the Refrain of *O Come, All Ye Faithful*, you'll find yourself (at first), singing ALL these numbers and the "ands". But because we'll need to breathe, we'll replace that last "eighth" of the phrase with an inhalation, just as you will when singing the lyrics. It's as though you leave-off the last half-count you're thinking about. Instead of *singing* the "and," you breathe. (The X below represents where you'll inhale.)

O	come,	let	us	a -	dore	him,	O	come,	let	us	a -	dore	him,
4 &	1 &	2 &	T &	4 &	1 & 2 &	T &	4 &	1 &	2 &.	T.&	4 &	1 & 2 &.	T &
						X							X
O	come,	let	us	a -	dore	him,	Christ,	the	Lord.				
4 &	1 &	2 &.	T &	4 &	1 & 2 &.	T &	4 &	1 & 2 & T &	4 &	&	1 & 2 & T &.		
						X							

Instrumentalists are taught to count from their earliest lessons; most singers are not (perhaps because we have words to pronounce?) I've often seen instrumentalists become frustrated with singers who don't count. It's our *mutual* attention to TIME that unites us. Join me being attentive to counting and to feeling the underlying pulse! Your effort will make us better.

**TRUTH:** You may find count-singing frustrating at first, but if you persist patiently, I promise it will improve your music-making. It's an investment that doesn't cost money, though you may seek therapy. :-)

**SIDE BAR:** Bobby McFerrin, best known perhaps for his song, *Don't Worry, Be Happy*, was one of the first contemporary artists to incorporate vocal percussion in his performances. We're accustomed to hearing *A Cappella* groups include a "beat boxer." McFerrin has such remarkable vocal technique, changing octaves at will, that he somehow did his own beat boxing! One of my favorite songs he recorded is, *I'm My Own Walkman*. (Remember the SONY Walkman?) His point was that we don't need to rely on an accompaniment track; the music can emanate from within each of us. It's timely to mention his song, *Discipline*, which features his father, Robert McFerrin, a former MET bass, as soloist. The Lyrics: "For those who have been trained by it, no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful." Hah! Together, let's convert the pain of count-singing to pleasure as we elevate our musicianship!