

THE KEY TO GOOD CANTORING

PART FOUR: BODY LANGUAGE AND CORRECT USE OF THE MICROPHONE

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This is the final article in a four-part series on the various elements of animation. Animation is that element in cantoring that separates the beginners from the more advanced. In the first three articles we explored the importance of memorizing music, of using appropriate eye contact/facial expressions, and of correct use of the gesture. In this article we examine appropriate body language and correct use of the microphone. While each of these elements is critical in itself, it is important that we include them together in this overview of animation.

Correct body language is very important in conveying the message of the words we sing. As with the gesture, it is important that our movements be slow and careful. Cantors need to keep in mind that every movement is noticeable by the congregation. Whether we shuffle our music, adjust our clothes, play with our hair, look at our watch, or look at or away from the presider, all of our movements are noticed by everyone!

In addition to being careful with our movements, cantors (and all liturgical ministers) should use care to turn their bodies properly in the direction of the “action” of the Mass or other ritual celebration. For example, when the priest is speaking,

we should physically turn our bodies in his direction. We should also turn toward the lector when he or she is proclaiming the first or second reading. This movement helps to direct the rest of the assembly’s attention to the activity around the altar. Likewise, it would be ideal if the other liturgical ministers could turn their bodies toward the cantor during the responsorial psalm. These skills in using our bodies are similar to the skills that an actor employs when performing in a play. They are all intended to help the busy human brain (and heart) focus attention on the action at hand.

Another critical skill that coincides with proper body language is correct use of the microphone. While there have been entire articles and books written on this matter, basically the correct use/misuse of the microphone can make or break even the best cantor. One rule remains steadfastly true for all cantors: Back away from the microphone and let the people sing!

You may say that this is easier said than done, but here are some helpful tips. First, cantors need to know what type of microphone they are using and how strong it is. Most music directors are knowledgeable about the type of equipment in their church; they are also skilled in knowing the acoustics of singing in an empty or a full church. Second, there are some simple rules to follow in correct use of the microphone: Stay close to the microphone when you are singing solo verses of the psalm or the Gospel acclamation; back up especially during hymns and refrains of any responsorial music. When you are close to the microphone, be careful not to stand too close. Consonants



will “pop” and the assembly will not be encouraged to sing. Getting the whole assembly to participate through singing is our goal, but if we are too close to the microphone or too loud, we will overpower the congregation and perhaps discourage their efforts at full, active participation!

There is much to say about the best ways one can animate the assembly. Without question, it is one of the most important skills a cantor can possess. Even a singer with an average voice can become a cantor if she or he is willing to memorize music; use proper eye contact or facial expressions, a good gesture, and proper body language; and use a microphone effectively. Take up the challenge—get your head (and your eyes) out of the music and *look* at the other members your assemblies. They will be grateful for your efforts! ☺