

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Research

Vocal ensembles such as choirs, girl bands, boy bands, gospel groups, and many more have been ingrained in society as a platform for communal singing. One of the most fascinating types of vocal ensembles is the contemporary Acapella group. Contemporary acapella ensembles are described as ensembles that “arrange, perform, and record contemporary popular music without instrumental accompaniment.”¹ Acapella groups usually achieve this by mimicking the sounds of the “instrumental accompaniment” with their voices instead of actual musical instruments under a lead solo singing. This act of mimicry is what makes an acapella group unique, compelling, and set apart from other vocal ensembles. Aside from imitating sounds and translating them into voices, another thing that makes acapella groups stand out from the rest is where they take their source material for a performance. Most acapella groups will choose a recorded song from the twentieth or twenty-first century and do a cover of the recorded song instead of coming up with an original song. A reason for this is that acapella groups find it much more difficult to compose an original song in acapella format instead of

¹ Paul, J. Mayhew, “Perceptions of Collegiate Contemporary A Cappella Ensembles.” *Research Perspectives in Music Education* 13, no. 1 (May 2009): 22.

arranging something that has already existed. A perfect example of an acapella group is the world-famous five-member acapella group Pentatonix.

Like in any other vocal ensembles, singing in an acapella group requires both technique and artistry. One of the most important objectives for a vocal ensemble to achieve is the vocal blend. A vocal blend is defined as “an ensemble sound in which individual voices are not separately discernible to a listener.”² This means that when a vocal director deals with their vocal ensemble, they are looking for ways to unify each individual sound so that they can sound balanced and blended. The vocal blend holds a high degree of importance to a vocal ensemble because it contributes to the aesthetic values of their performance. It signifies that the vocal director is professional in their field of expertise and that their ensemble displays perfect teamwork. Achieving the vocal blend, however, remains a difficult task for the vocal director, especially when dealing with amateur ensembles. In an article done by Edwin W. Jones, he states that the problem of vocal blend mostly stems from individual singers that have yet to raise their awareness when singing with other individuals. This can result in an individual singer singing louder than their colleagues or individual singers with unique timbres struggling to blend their voices with their peers.³ Larry Wyatt also discovered that other common problems with vocal blend include not achieving homogeneity in vowel and intonation which stems from the poor vocal technique.⁴

² Allen W. Goodwin , “An Acoustical Study of Individual Voices in Choral Blend,” *Journal of REsearch in Music Education* 28, no. 2 (1980): 119.

³ Edwin W. Jones, “Choral Balance and Blend,” *American Music Teacher* 5, no. 2 (November 1955): 2-16, accessed November 12, 2021.

⁴ Larry Wyatt, “BLEND in CHORAL SOUND: Factors Related to Its Achievement — Vowels,” *The Choral Journal* 8, no. 1 (September 1967): 15-18, accessed November 12, 2021.

Because of the phenomena surrounding the problems with the vocal blend, the researcher is inspired to research more about the topic. In a recent survey conducted by the researcher, six experienced voice ensemble teachers from the music faculty of Universitas Pelita Harapan, Indonesia, admitted that achieving vocal blend is considerably harder for amateur vocal ensembles. The teachers also agree that vocal technique, artistry, and experience are indeed factors that can significantly affect the quality of a vocal blend.

While the topic of the vocal blend has been widely explored and researched, there are still very few that discuss it in the acapella setting. In addition, there are fewer studies on factors that influence vocal blends in an acapella setting. Because of this phenomenon, the researcher has decided to conduct a case study on the vocal blend of Universitas Pelita Harapan's all-female acapella group: VOXCOM UPH. VOXCOM UPH's is an all-female A Cappella group consisting of female undergraduate students that have passed the VOXCOM audition. Its activities are done in class and includes arranging, sight-singing, singing, and recording songs. As mentioned above, vocal technique and experience play an important role in affecting the quality of a vocal blend, however, since the researcher wishes to conduct an in-depth study, they also included artistry and other factors as a consideration.

1.2 Research Question

In accordance to the previously established background, this research seeks to answer the questions:

1. What are the factors that affect the quality of a vocal blend in an acapella group, specifically in VOXCOM UPH?
2. What are further recommendations that can help solve vocal blending issues in acapella groups?

1.3 Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research aims to investigate factors that can affect the quality of a vocal blend in the a cappella setting, specifically in VOXCOM UPH and further recommendations that can help solve vocal blending issues in acapella groups.

1.4 Scope of Research

This research will only discuss the topics surrounding factors that can affect the quality of a vocal blend in an acapella setting, specifically in VOXCOM UPH and further recommendations that can help solve vocal blending issues in acapella groups.

1.5 Benefits of Research

1. Theoretical Benefits: This research aims to provide theoretical benefits regarding vocal blend, specifically factors that can affect the quality of a vocal blend in a an acapella setting. This research also aims to provide references for further researches and studies which discusses the topic of vocal blend in an acapella setting.
2. Practical Benefits:

- a. For the researcher: provides a wider range of knowledge on the topic of vocal blend, specifically what factors can affect the quality of a vocal blend in an acapella setting.
- b. For readers: provides understanding on the topic of vocal blend, specifically on the factors that can affect the quality of a vocal blend in an acapella setting.
- c. For educators: provides a reference for voice educators in the field of vocal blend, specifically on what factors affects the quality of a vocal blend in an acapella setting.
- d. For undergraduates: provides a better understanding on the topic of vocal blend, especially on the factors that can affect the quality of a vocal blend in an acapella setting.

