

## **Feed the Meter**

Mary Ellen Pinzino

(Southwest Division ACDA 2006)

How do you prioritize the following for rhythmic vitality?

- A. Note values
- B. Tempo
- C. Time Signature
- D. Meter

Meter is often neglected in the choral rehearsal, yet meter inspires momentum, secures tempo, and drives rhythmic vitality. We often lose sight and sound of meter in our efforts to secure note values, maintain tempos, and explain time signatures. Developing a sense of meter in our singers propels musicality. Making meter come alive can transform choral performance.

Meter is not defined by time signatures or conducting patterns, but by the strength and pattern of weight given to beats. A regular pattern of weight that defines strong beats, (macro beats), divided into three beats of lesser weight, (micro beats), establishes triple meter, whatever the time signature or conducting pattern. Performance in any meter without weight that defines the meter is unmusical, even if with beautiful tone and precise intonation.

“Counting” beats does not guarantee their relationship to meter, to weight, nor to musicality. Weight in meter is best manifest physically through body weight. Rehearsing a song in any meter with singers moving both macro and micro beats, with appropriate distribution of weight, sustains momentum, secures tempo, and propels musicality. Swaying or moving only macro beats will rush the tempo, as weighted micro beats in relation to more heavily weighted macro beats are essential for singers to sustain tempo. Moving only micro beats will not define the meter, as without stronger, weighted macro beats, all beats sound alike. Both macro and micro beats are necessary, with appropriate weight distribution, in order for singers to perform rhythm precisely and musically.

Techniques that weight syllables to clarify text cannot be generalized to the next piece of music, whereas weighting macro and micro beats can be applied to all choral music. A strong sense of meter propels performance, providing for text to fall into place, for shifting meters to be easily navigated, and for syncopation to play against the expected weight. Proper weighting of macro and micro beats is as important to achieving rhythmic vitality as vocal technique is to achieving a beautiful sound.

Choral warm-ups can be designed to develop a sense of meter through experience with a variety of meters in movement, including unusual meters in five and seven as well as duple and triple meters, each with its own pattern of weight in macro and micro beats. Select one meter to use as a warm-up in each rehearsal, rotating meters through

successive rehearsals. Orally deliver a handful of rhythm patterns in the meter for singers to chant repeatedly on a neutral syllable while moving both macro and micro beats with appropriate weight distribution. Without interrupting the meter by talking, improvise more difficult patterns for singers to chant while moving in the meter, extending the meter experience for several minutes. Chanting and moving in a variety of meters, without melody or text, stimulates the perception of relationships between macro and micro beats, the easy placement of challenging patterns within the matrix of macro and micro beats, and the discrimination between meters—not in theoretical definitions, but in the *sense* of meter.

Weighted movement applied directly to any piece of choral music will spark a dramatic difference in performance. As a sense of meter develops in singers, overt movement for meter becomes covert movement—momentum. Choral performance takes on new vitality when propelled by meter.

*To request permission to reproduce any part of this article in any form, write:*  
[mepinzino@comechildrensing.com](mailto:mepinzino@comechildrensing.com)

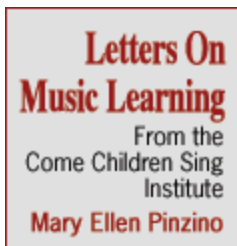
\*\*\*\*\*

## **Additional Resources by Mary Ellen Pinzino**

[www.comechildrensing.com](http://www.comechildrensing.com)



**SONG LIBRARY**—More than 500 new songs for children of all ages—preschool, elementary, children’s chorus. See notation, hear songs, print copies. Many songs in various tonalities and meters, including art songs for young children, songs for choral performance, and songs and chants without words. Developed at the Come Children Sing Institute, composed by Mary Ellen Pinzino. CD-ROM  
[www.comechildrensing.com/public\\_pages/songlibrary.php](http://www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/songlibrary.php)



**Letters On Music Learning**—reflections on music teaching and learning at the Come Children Sing Institute. Topics include movement, art songs for young children, a new tonal syllable system, music reading and writing, and classroom research on the development of tonal and rhythm audiation in relation to the work of Edwin Gordon. Written by Mary Ellen Pinzino. E-Book—128 pages. Printable PDF file.

<https://www.comechildrensing.com/catalog/index.php>



**Come Children, Sing! Online Music Classes for Infants, Babies and Toddlers**—Early childhood music classes for parent and child in their own home, on their own schedule—includes MP3 files, activities, parent tips, and a resource for busy parents about early childhood music learning. Curriculum developed at the Come Children Sing Institute. Classes taught by Mary Ellen Pinzino.

[www.comechildrensing.com](http://www.comechildrensing.com)



**Gift Certificates—Come Children, Sing! Online Music Classes for Infants, Babies and Toddlers**—Gift Certificates for early childhood music classes for parent and child in their own home, on their own schedule—includes MP3 files, activities, parent tips, and a resource for busy parents about early childhood music learning. Curriculum developed at the Come Children Sing Institute. Classes taught by Mary Ellen Pinzino

<https://www.comechildrensing.com/catalog/index.php>

## Articles by Mary Ellen Pinzino

**“Awakening Artistry in the Choral Rehearsal.”** Article addressing the use of movement in the choral rehearsal, spanning children through college singers. (International Choral Bulletin, 2006.)

[www.comechildrensing.com/public\\_pages/forteachers.php](http://www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php)

**“A Conversation with Edwin Gordon.”** Interview with Edwin Gordon, discussing various aspects of his work. (Musicstaff.com, 1998.)

[www.comechildrensing.com/public\\_pages/forteachers.php](http://www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php)

**“Audiation In Flight.”** Article addressing movement with song in the elementary school context. (Michigan GIML, 2005.)

[www.comechildrensing.com/public\\_pages/forteachers.php](http://www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php)

**“Feed the Meter.”** Article addressing the importance of meter in choral performance. (Southwest Division ACDA, 2006.)

[www.comechildrensing.com/public\\_pages/forteachers.php](http://www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php)

**Come Children, Sing! Online Music Classes for Infants, Babies and Toddlers.** Includes extensive writing for parents about early childhood music development.

<https://www.comechildrensing.com/catalog/index.php>

## Selected Articles from “Letters On Music Learning,”

E-Book addressing music teaching and learning at the Come Children Sing Institute

**“Audiation—Another Way of Knowing”**

[https://www.comechildrensing.com/public\\_pages/forteachers.php](https://www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php)

“Ode to Movement” [https://www.comechildrensing.com/public\\_pages/forteachers.php](https://www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php)

“Art Songs for Young Children”

[https://www.comechildrensing.com/public\\_pages/forteachers.php](https://www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php)

“Song Writing”

[https://www.comechildrensing.com/public\\_pages/forteachers.php](https://www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php)



**Mary Ellen Pinzino** is the Founder/Director of the Come Children Sing Institute, a center for research and development in music learning since 1984. She is the composer of the Come Children Sing Institute SONG LIBRARY, a CD-ROM resource of more than 500 new songs for preschool, elementary school and children’s chorus, and creator of the Come Children Sing Institute music curriculum for children from birth through thirteen. She is the developer of Come Children, Sing! Online Music Classes for infants, babies and toddlers, and leads the production of I, the television program for preschool music.

Mary Ellen has taught all ages from birth through graduate students, teaching preschool classes and conducting the children’s choruses at the Come Children Sing Institute, and directing the Institute’s teacher training program. She has also taught elementary school music, high school choral music, graduate school music education courses, and served as conductor of the Women’s Choral Ensemble at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She authored 14 issues of *Letters On Music Learning* for music teachers, now compiled as an E-Book, has written additional articles for national and international publications, and writes extensively for parents about early childhood music learning for Come Children, Sing! Online Music Classes.

Mary Ellen’s comprehensive work with infants, toddlers and preschoolers, her research on the process of music learning and music literacy, her work with children’s choirs and the application of movement in the choral rehearsal with singers of all ages, her many compositions for children, and her unique applications of technology to music learning have put her on the cutting edge in the field of music education. She is in demand as a clinician, presenting nationally and internationally for music educators’ organizations, including the International Society for Music Education, the Music Educators National Conference, the American Orff-Schulwerk Association, the Organization of American Kodaly Educators, the American Choral Directors Association, Suzuki Institutes, and the Gordon Institute for Music Learning. She has also presented in Portugal at the University of Lisbon, and most recently in Indonesia for the East Asian Regional Council of Overseas Schools and the Jakarta International School.

Mary Ellen received bachelor’s and master’s degrees in music education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and studied extensively with Edwin Gordon. She can be reached at [mepinzino@comechildrensing.com](mailto:mepinzino@comechildrensing.com).