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relaxed, go through each part marking in breathing places. Clearly, many of these will often be at rests or at punctuation marks in the text. Be prepared to get all singers to cut a long note slightly short if a breath is needed and remember that unanimous breathing can actually increase the rhythmic impact:

Traditional: Buffalo Girls

As I was lum - b'ring down the street, down the street,

Sometimes, however, the music will yield no obvious gaps and the style may demand that singers stagger their breathing. Below is a verse of a well-known Christmas carol with some potential breathing problems. A breath at the end of the first line should work well, but breathing in the middle of the line will make nonsense of the words. If singers cannot sustain the long *Gloria*, staggered breathing during some of the dotted notes will help to disguise the fact from the audience:

Anon. (16th century)

No breath Breath ✓

Ding dong! mer-ri-ly on high → in heav'n the bells are ring - ing;  
Ding dong! ve-ri-ly the sky → is riv'n with an - gel sing - ing.

Staggered breathing if needed Breath ✓

Glo - - - - - ri - a, Ho - san - na in ex - cel - sis!

While all singers will need to be reminded to respond early if they are to take a good breath *in*, inexperienced singers may also have to be told to breathe *out*. Although a long sung phrase can feel as if it has drained you of air, in fact you are unlikely to have used even half of your actual reserves. The problem is that what is left is depleted of oxygen and all of it needs to be replaced. If young singers complain of feeling dizzy or faint, this is probably what is happening; some relaxed, full breaths between phrases will generally cure them.

*Chapter Seven*

## Creating an Interpretation

Once everyone has learnt their parts and can come in at the right places, respond to dynamic and articulation markings and be alert to your direction, the really creative aspect of rehearsing can begin.

The director's job is partly a matter of co-ordination and partly about communication. Ask yourself what an audience requires from a musical performance. It is entitled to expect:

- ◆ Right notes with good intonation
- ◆ Clear words
- ◆ Unanimous, well-balanced ensemble
- ◆ A group which has taken the trouble to look good on stage

You, as co-ordinator, will have made sure that all these things are present in the performance as a matter of courtesy to the audience and self-respect for the musicians. However, your listeners will be much more excited if they also get:

- ◆ Music which is rhythmically alive
- ◆ Phrasing that is expressive and always has shape and direction
- ◆ An interpretation which creates a real sense of atmosphere
- ◆ Performers who are totally absorbed in what they are doing and who seem to be enjoying themselves

Sometimes, fuzzy ensemble can be cured simply by checking that players with similar parts are listening to each other. For example, this music is unlikely ever to be completely together if the violin tries to fit with the oboe while the viola is listening only to the cello:

Mozart: Oboe Quartet, K.370 (first movement: bars 46-48)

Similarly, you may be able to tighten up a bass guitar part by making sure that the bassist is listening to the drummer rather than the singer. Drummers, of course, have never been known to listen to anybody!

Another useful tip for obtaining cohesive rhythm: performers often find it difficult to move off some tied notes early enough. This is particularly problematic in fast-moving contrapuntal music where there is little room for flexibility:

Bach: Cantata No.51 (Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen: bars 25-27)

Practise first omitting the tie, so that each of the semiquavers is in the right place. Next, encourage the musicians to feel the impulse of the tied note without actually playing it – possibly by leaving a semiquaver rest. There is then time to breathe, re-position the bow, etc., before moving off again. Alternatively, if a gap is not wanted, try a *crescendo* through the long note, aiming its focus on the tied note.