

Electronic Tablets in Rehearsal

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The first steps into digital sheet music have been taken. While there is much room for growth and development there are several tools available for use in the traditional choral rehearsal in the areas of music readers, notation readers and audio/video apps.

Music Readers are a category of app that will display PDF files. iBooks or any app that reads a PDF file will work. However, dedicated music readers such as [ForScore](#) and [unrealBook](#) do much more to enhance your rehearsal. These apps have tools that allow you to add common musical notation symbols, hand written music markings, etc., to the PDF file and save them. They will turn pages correctly, meaning at the DS al Coda it will flip back to the sign and then skip to the coda. (Of course you have to tell it where those are first.) A Bluetooth device can be used for hands-free page turns (accompanists love that!) A new addition to the apps is the ability to link an MP3 or MIDI file to the PDF. You can play a rehearsal recording while you read the music, all from within the app. There are many, *many* more features. Check out the iTunes Store for details. ForScore is currently \$6.99; unrealBook is \$4.99.

Notation Readers are apps that will read the files of the two common notation programs. The Finale reader is [Finale Songbook](#). The Sibelius reader is [Avid Scorch](#). These readers will play the audio of the notated music using full orchestra sounds, dynamic and tempo changes, etc., just as when you play the file through the desktop application. The apps do not allow modification such as editing notes, instrumentation, relative volume, etc. With Songbook, if the original file is set up correctly, you can select the part you want to play. For example, the file could play just the piano, or just the piano and baritone part. Both apps are a bit unstable, so don't be surprised if they crash now and then. Songbook is free. Scorch is currently \$1.99.

This category of apps is a strong choice for the individual singer during rehearsal. As a conductor I use Songbook frequently to play an accompaniment during rehearsal or sectional that is beyond my skill. As a singer I use the app to play the accompaniment and my part as I learn my music on my own.

Audio/Visual Apps don't usually come to mind for rehearsal, but if you let your creativity loose there are always new things to try. Use the camera to record the choir. During playback ask them evaluate their performance and suggest techniques to improve. It is really good for showing the effects of sloppy choreography! A singer had to miss rehearsal a few weeks ago and asked if they could Facetime during the rehearsal so they wouldn't miss any information. There are several video conferencing apps that would allow you to do something similar with a group. I think it is an ethical requirement to let a conductor know they are going to be on camera. Let your imagination run wild!

One word of caution – Copyright. A PDF file of a song is the same as a photocopy of a song. Before you distribute PDF's of protected materials ensure that you own enough printed copies, or have written permission to duplicate the number required for each singer in your organization. Technically, any digital reproduction of music is a violation of copyright law, but honestly, no one is going to come after you if you have purchased the amount of music required. I recommend that any digital file is produced with an obvious header stating something like, "This file is for use by current singing members of _____ (*your organization's name*) only. It must be deleted on or before _____ (*the day after your last performance.*)" I encourage you to have a discussion with your Board to develop policies for digital music use, distribution, sharing and deletion.

The last word (and I hate to open this can of worms.) At the present time the apps that are most useful in rehearsal are for iPad only. App development on the Android side is far behind the development for the iOS platform in this niche area. Someday that may change, but at the present time the Android tablets will not serve you as well as an iPad during rehearsal.