

Survey and research on just intonation

<http://www.justaentonacion.com/encuesta/encuesta.htm>

Of the "Project just intonation" © José García Illa, 2015
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Dear Mr. / Ms. ... Director of..., member of...

I am interested in the subject of just intonation in a cappella choral singing, especially in the aspect of practical application. Since this is a major issue for the choral community, I have developed a survey, which I would appreciate your answering. I would also be grateful for your overall viewpoint on the topic. Naturally, I guarantee that your answers will be kept in the strictest confidence, and I will inform you about the global results of the research.

You can send the answer to jgarciailla@ono.com.

1) Do you, or the group or groups you know, in your (or their) rehearsals or a cappella live performances, usually look for pure harmonic intervals of fifth and third, by approaching simple ratios (2:3, greater than the tempered fifth; 4:5, smaller than the tempered major third)? Do you think that habitual use of equal temperament hinders or prevents the achievement of these pure intervals?

2) Do you (or they) normally use— consciously and systematically, or to any extent—, the sounds and intervals of just intonation (Zarlino's or justly tuned scale, minor and major tones, different types of semitones, syntonic comma, duplication of the second degree of the major scale, different intonation of the notes according to the key...) or other specific tuning system? Or is the achievement of pure harmonic intervals the result of a desire to sing in tune intuitively by listening to the voices and following a heuristic method?

3) Is the use of just intonation, or the tendency to pure intervals, limited to the predominantly homophonic textures? Do you (or they) use any conscious intonational strategy in contexts of polyphonic texture or where the melody is predominant: Zarlino's or justly tuned scale, Pythagorean scale, equal temperament scale...?

4) In case of using pure intervals, how do you (or they) solve the problems caused by the contradiction between the horizontal trends (leading ascending notes) and vertical ones (major third smaller than the tempered one), for example in the dominant chord?

5) How do you (or they) solve the problem of pitch drift, e.g. in links between second and fifth scale degrees (Dm - GM chords) or in fragments with modulations? Do you (or they) consciously perform adjustments of syntonic comma in some of the voices in the required places? Or do you (or they) rather use auditory memory of important scale degrees —tonic and dominant— to keep the pitch steady and try to make pure intervals if possible?

6) From the point of view of a correct intonation, how do you (or they) deal with works with a great deal of chromaticism and frequent modulations? Do you use just intonation in this type of work, or some form of temperament or other specific model?

7) Do you (or they) modify intonation consciously or unconsciously when you (or they) sing a cappella rather than when accompanied by piano or other instruments tuned in the equal temperament system?

8) In your experience in choral singing, do you think that performing pure harmonic intervals is the natural tuning to which choirs tend, perhaps guided by overtones of the other voices or by avoiding beats? How and to what extent does our habituation to equal temperament interfere with this natural tendency (if it exists)?

9) Do you know of other individuals or groups who are interested in just intonation or who perform in just intonation?

10) Any other comments or observations on the subject of intonation that you consider interesting or important.

I would like to thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

José García Illa