

SING YOUR PART SMART

All

Hierarchy of Sound

- Posture
- Breath (support & management)
- Phonation (vocal fold movement: speaking and/or singing)
- Resonation (amplification of sound in resonating chambers)
- Articulation (tongue, lips, teeth)

Singing skills

- Good sense of pitch
- Resonance
- American English vowel sounds
- Ring and roundness: brightness and depth: focus and space
- Controlled vibrato (one that is regular, not too slow, not trill-like)
- Open-throated sound

Barbershop style

- Cone-shaped balance
- Unaccompanied
- Director shapes vocal line
- Vowel to vowel singing
- Rubato style delivery in ballads
- Pythagorean tuning
- Unity of sound
- Memorized literature
- Performance based art form

Characteristics of a trained/developed voice

- Well-coordinated sound. One instrument with even quality from lowest register to 20highest register. Singer is aware of differences but listener is not.
- Clarity and roundness; tone always shimmering, buoyant and expressive.
- Forward quality, words seem to move naturally.
- Flexibility; more than one type of tone available. Singer adds vocal color and texture, becomes a musical actress. Use of tone colors and textures.
- Same vocal quality with wide variety of dynamics. Warmth of interpretation results with ability to command constant change in dynamic.
- Controlled, pleasing, regular vibrato (singer controls it, not the other way around!)

Ryan's Rules

- Maintain singing posture
- Know what you're singing about
- Use color
- Sing phrases and line
- Listen with musicians' ears
- Breathe silently
- Stay relaxed and free
- Think ahead
- Keep your face on and perform
- Maintain the life of the sound (music is alive and moving - sing through and give shape to long notes, lift phrase endings, support softs, etc.)
- Fill-up and command your space
- WATCH!
- Make every night a chorus night!!

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Tenor In barbershop music, the tenor is the highest of the four voice parts – a harmony part sung mostly above the melody. The tenor sings into the overtones that the other three parts produce, offering the charm of the sound. The average range extends from F above middle C to G (an octave higher), occasionally extending a couple of notes in either direction. Tenors must sing with a lighter production than that used by the lower voices, without sacrificing clarity or brilliance. Her quality must compliment but never overshadow that of the lead voice. The tenor sings mostly in her upper register (head voice), but she must be able to add to that the heavier lower register (chest voice) quality for the lower notes in her range. The tenor must broaden her quality when her notes are under the lead part so that the chords will remain in balance.

Skills

- Develop good, free, upper range. At the same time, develop ALL of the range.
- Ability to keep soft palate active on all sounds.
- Relaxed throat, jaw, and tongue – all free from tension.
- Keep championship posture at all times.
- Good body tone in the abdominal muscles used for supported sound.
- Use of “inside smile”.
- Develop breath management and support. “Spend” air, avoid “conserving” it.
- Tenors “hang out” often on tags! So, know how to manage breath, sound, and performance energy
- Sing from vowel to vowel, without mushing, to contribute to the constant wall of sound.
- Develop a sense of the leads vocal delivery.

Techniques

- Be aware of Pythagorean tuning and use it.
- Tune up any octaves sung with another part.
- Let vowels migrate towards more open, neutral ones as tones go higher.
- Use a light, clear and focused production but develop and use a strong mixed voice when singing under or close to the lead.
- Find the feeling of singing in the bridge of the nose and use plenty of air to keep tone spinning.
- Be aware of altered notes and how to tune them.
- Keep high notes open and free; use support system to avoid pinching/squeezing.
- Listen for and sing into the produced overtones.
- Sing with the same emotion as the lead.

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Lead The lead “leads” the quartet or chorus and embodies the spirit of the group. The lead is the personality, the salesman of the unit, and therefore must be the most accomplished, accurate and consistent. The lead is one of the two middle voice parts in barbershop music, and she generally sings the melody. The average lead range extends from A below middle C to C above middle C, occasionally extending a note or two in either direction. The lead must sing with authority, clarity and with a consistent quality throughout her range. When the lead sings below middle C, she must be able to use a rich, full lower register (chest voice) production to project those low tones and remain in balance. As her part goes into the octave above middle C, she needs to gradually mix in the upper register (head voice) so that tone production is shared by the two registers, with the upper register becoming predominant as the part line reaches high C. The lead sings with enough vibrato to add color and warmth to the sound but not so much that chords cannot lock, or that it becomes difficult for the harmony parts to tune to her part. Finally, since the lead sings the melody, she is the one responsible for conveying the interpretation, emotion and inflection of the song.

Skills

- Use championship posture.
- Develop a seamless voice.
- Develop ALL of the range.
- Maintain an open throat while keeping the entire instrument free and relaxed.
- Active soft palate.
- Breath management and support; controlled vibrato; “spend” air, avoid “conserving” it.
- While all sounds are rich and open, they also ring (inside smile).
- Develop a strong mixed voice.
- Find correct balance between resonators.
- Pure open vowels the other parts can match.
- Stamina (developed by consistent, regular practice).
- Freedom of jaw, throat, and tongue.
- Consistency in vocal delivery (including dynamic plan, interpretive plan, texture, color, etc.)

Techniques

- Sing with energy, vitality, and authority.
- Vocalize higher and lower than a song demands for more flexible tone.
- Stop listening and start feeling; sing what you mean and mean what you sing.
- Be aware of Pythagorean tuning and use it.
- Maintain open resonators (inside smile, active palate) for control of color, texture, etc.
- Sing vowel to vowel and use pure vowels with clear diphthongs and consonants of appropriate duration (understandable, not over-articulated, lyrics).
- Keep the melody consistent and in the forefront.

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Baritone The baritone is the other one of the two middle voice parts in barbershop music – a harmony part sung below and above the melody, depending on where the melody is situated. Baritone differs from the alto part in traditional chorus music because the baritone part frequently crosses over the melody (lead). The average baritone range extends from G below middle C to A above middle C, and occasionally extends a note or two in either direction. Though the baritone and lead sing in the same basic range, the techniques for singing the two parts are quite different. The baritone sings throughout her range with varying degrees of clarity and brilliance than that used by the lead. She must be constantly aware of her position in the chord, and flexible enough to adjust her tone production whenever that position, in relation to the lead, changes. When she is singing below the lead, she uses a rich, full sound that helps to solidify the relationship between the lead and bass. When she is above the lead, she uses a lighter production, similar to that used by the tenor. The baritone sings a relatively straight tone, with minimum of vibrato.

Skills

- Learn to sing using a mixed voice.
- Keep resonators open and flexible.
- Use inside smile and “hum spot” to be able to focus sound off the hard palate.
- Use championship posture.
- Keep jaw, tongue, and lips free from tension.
- Breath management and support; “spend” air, avoid “conserving” it.
- Develop ALL of the range.
- Build vocal stamina through regular, consistent practice.
- Tune to the tonal center while listening carefully to the other parts, adjusting accordingly.
- Listen, listen, listen (but don’t be late!)

Techniques

- Know when/how to alter your sound to fill the cone; sing to the space that needs filling with the desired timbre.
- Use energy, focus and lower mix when below or close to the lead part, lighter production when above.
- Be aware of Pythagorean tuning and use it.
- Tune up octaves.
- Be aware of altered notes and how they’re tuned.
- Keep sound in most resonant place.
- Always sing into the wall of sound.
- Use vocal energy without muscling the sound.
- Sing with the same emotion as the lead.
- Be prepared to not sound pretty to your own ears!

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Bass

- The bass is the foundation of the unit, regardless of her position in the chord or register. The bass sings with no breaks or holes in her sound. The bass lays down a consistent wall of sound, most often dynamically greater than the lead. In barbershop music, the bass is the lowest of the four voice parts – a harmony part sung below the melody. The average bass range extends from D below middle C to F above middle C, occasionally extending down to C, an octave below middle C. Since one of the primary characteristics of barbershop music is its cone-shaped sound, the bass must sing with a fuller presence than that used by the upper voices. The harmonic structure of barbershop music assists the bass in providing a firm foundation for the sound. Ideally, the bass and lead work as a team; the lead sings the melody and the bass provides the harmonic foundation, generally on the root or the fifth of the chord. The bass sings mostly in her lower register (chest voice) with a rich, full, broad tone that has clarity and focus. She sings a relatively straight tone with a minimum of vibrato. The bass becomes a “pseudo-lead” when the lead is not moving/singing, responsible for tempo and motion.

Skills

- Sing with championship posture.
- Develop ALL of the range.
- Learn to sing as high as possible.
- Add space and support to higher tones, less on lower.
- Keep chin level with floor – don’t reach up or down!
- Develop good breath control – management and support; “spend” air, avoid “conserving” it.
- Learn to relax the bottom of the range, allow the tones to come, and focus them behind the upper teeth.

Techniques

- Sing with strength and create a firm foundation with consistency.
- Drive the tempo on uptunes.
- Match everything the lead does, and add energy.
- Don’t jar the line when jumping (up or down).
- Give up the muscle - keep the tone energized, resonant, and present (but not tight and heavy).
- Be aware of Pythagorean tuning and use it.
- Use breath to create full sound – work on management and support.
- Sing with the same emotion as the lead.