

LEAD

The Lead gives the song “heart.” The lead is in charge of the song’s message and interpretation. She must be able to sing the song and its phrases with feeling and flow. A lead must **want** to sing the song if the ensemble is ever to sing it well. She is the focal point and establishes the personality of the ensemble. The lead is the only child, she’s the boss, a chosen and born leader. The lead works harder and prepares more thoroughly than others. All other parts must tune to the lead; whither she goest, so go they. She must have a commitment to accuracy and to be “on” all the time, on both the key and the stage. A lead should study the melody and be creative and expressive with its delivery. Take into account the critical words and always keep forward motion in mind. Look for the climax (two are even better—a sub-climax and the real thing). Take the melody and message to its highest point, enthrall the listeners, and take them to a new level of musical joy and understanding.

Defining qualities:

Good solo voice—most important quality is that it is freely produced with an open, soaring sound; it should be pleasing to hear, clear, and have a distinctive style. The lead needs to develop melodic flexibility and smooth transition over breaks. The voice must be well-supported and have sufficient strength for other parts to hang onto. It should be consistently resonant in the complete range with correct focus, placement, and textures.

- Willingness to take critique and improve
- Continuing to improve, even after reaching obvious goals
- Giving time and commitment to reach goals
- Vulnerability—opening self to audience
- Passion and Soul
- Sense of personal style
- Drama
- Consistency
- Strong tonal center
- Knowing place in chord
- Over-and always prepared
- Brilliance
- Ring, ping, buzz
- Ability to sell the message
- Super saleswoman
- Steady and reliable
- Using vocal color to set the mood
- Vitality, vibrancy, vigor, vim, vivacity
- Resonance throughout range so melody is never lost
- Emotion
- Richness
- Depth
- Freedom, Ease
- Clarity
- Resonance
- Color
- Warmth
- Accuracy
- Sense of true pitch
- Maintaining tonal center
- Skill in designing inflection and interpretation
- Consistency in intervals, rhythms, interpretation, breath plan, register transition

Caveat: Quit coaching when you sing; concentrate on your performance. Don’t listen to the others; keep the key, strategize and practice consistently the difficult phrases—especially downward part motion and ascending or jumpy lines. Work on delivering a smooth execution of the transition between the upper and lower register.

Bass

You are the “second lead” in the quartet. Your voice needs to support, complement, and enhance the quality of the lead voice. You may feel the need to sing “faster” to get to the open vowel at the same time as the lead. Your tones will always need to be louder in volume than those of the others because of where they appear in the acoustical range. However, **it’s not how loud you sing but how you sing loud that counts.**

- ✿ Avoid reverse coning
- ✿ Minimize consonants—aim for a smooth vocal line
- ✿ Keep the feeling of humming as you sing
- ✿ Sing with fearless authority and command
- ✿ Because you are a true “ham,” you have great stage presence
- ✿ You are the rock star in barbershop!
- ✿ Understand the strength of the root and fifth of the chord, the tones you sing most often.
- ✿ The goal for bass sound is melodic quality, a mellow, broad tone with clarity, focus, sufficient volume and weight
- ✿ You keep song in pitch, in rhythm
- ✿ Look for octave locks with tenor, especially key note tone

Your range and resonance are important, but resonance is more so. The quality and timbre of your voice determines the quality of the cone of entire group. Solidarity in the barbershop sound is vital. A house built on sand hasn’t a prayer.

Baritone

The baritone part is for the person able to mix her right and left brain. The singer must be able to get the technique in hand and then sing like it does not exist.

Baris have to be willing to take a back seat to the lead, knowing all along that the bari makes or breaks the lead. Learn to sing with slightly less authority and clarity than lead---with emphasis on “slightly”

Adhesiveness is what the baritone needs to pursue for the perfect vocal “marriage” with the lead. She has the duty to make the lead as beautiful as she can be. What the lead does, so does the bari. She must be willing to be in the background to the lead. The baritone takes on the quality of the lead only but sings with less volume and less clarity and brilliance. —she takes on the quality and nuance of the lead; is a mirror to her; and aims for instant acclimation, instant adjustment, instant reflection, instant lock. She sticks with the lead through everything.

She sings in two voices when above and below the lead. When your part is low, resonate to imitate the bass; high—to imitate the tenor. Below the lead—add depth, richness; above—softer, sparkle. She

continues the bass foundation and “makes the sound barbershop.” Baris are the tofu of barbershop, the chameleon, the glue of the unit.

You constantly shift your position on the cone and the “tone of your voice.” Baris know when to “spike” and when to “mellow out” the tone. Develop a sensitivity to your role in connecting the bass and lead qualities

It is important to know when to “sting” or “float” the note; distinguishing between harmony with the lead note and dissonance

A baritone must have a terrific ear and tuning expertise. She must know how to tune chord components and understand Pythagorean tuning, wherein some notes are “worth more” than others. In tuning, she finds and capitalizes on octaves, scissors, accidentals, dissonant major seconds. You live on octaves and 5ths—lock these with the appropriate part. Work with the tenor to fine tune chords.

Develop vocal agility and flexibility.

Tenor

The tenor completes the sound of the quartet. The magic word for tenors is “lightness.” The ear can easily hear the notes sung in the tenor register, so she can sing more softly--except where she carries the melody or sings below the lead in crossover chords. Her volume will increase as she comes down in her range and closer to the melody notes.

She must be careful of vibrato. She must control it to preserve the accuracy of the chord and the stability of the chord lock. She is the top star on the tree, the point of the cone and the keystone to the sound. Tenors should be seen and just barely heard, most of the time. She should allow her part and range “do the talking” for her.

A tenor sings with bravura, brilliance, a bell-like clarity and ease. It is important that she sing with a straight tone so that the chords will have an optimal chance for lock and ring.

She rides the overtone and makes the sound sparkle.

She does her 25% in the chord consistently and gives 100% of energy all the time.

She sings mostly in head voice, having a cathedral feeling within her mouth.

She has a good ear to tune the chord, always being aware of octaves and locking them with the appropriate part.

She recognizes and understands how to sing “scissors” passages, usually with the bass.

She listens to lead and tunes to her note; usually tunes on high side of her own note.

She should allow vowels to migrate toward a more neutral vowel as tones go high.

She should feel strength in bridge of nose and use plenty of air. “Spend” air; don’t “save it.” Give more width on very high tones. Don’t “pinch” or “squeeze” high notes. Use the upper rib cage for support of high tones. Dynamic volume should decrease as pitch goes up; need to add brilliance as pitch descends.

The Craft of Singing

By Joni Bescos

Tenor

In barbershop music, the tenor is the highest of the four voice parts- a harmony part sung above the melody. The average range extends from f (above *middle c'*) to f' (an octave higher), occasionally extending down to e' and up to a b" or a".

Since one of the primary characteristics of barbershop music is its cone-shaped sound, the tenor must sing with a lighter production than that used by the lower voices, without sacrificing clarity or brilliance. Her quality must complement, 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. Lyric sopranos generally make good tenors, but the coloratura, dramatic or mezzo soprano must be able to lighten the voice quality and remove any excessive vibrato in order to become a good barbershop tenor.

Pitches in the tenor range are resonated in the area of the pharynx directly behind the mouth (oropharynx) and in the area behind the soft palate (nasopharynx). It is important for tenors to keep the soft palate open so that the nasopharynx is available for resonance; a closed soft palate will result in a covered or muffled sound, lacking clarity and brilliance.

Very often our arrangements require the tenor to sing a few notes under the lead. When this occurs, the tenor must broaden her quality on the note(s) in question so that the chord(s) will remain in balance. Finally, the tenor must have a good ear so that she can tune to the chord. Like baritones, tenors frequently sing the thirds and sevenths of a chord- the two tones which require the greatest degree of pitch adjustment from the equally-tempered scale. These notes must be "tuned" so that chords will "lock."

Lead

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 b' (above *middle c'*), occasionally extending down to g, and up to c".

Because she carries the melody, 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.

The range of the lead part requires use of all the pharyngeal areas for resonance. The soft palate must be kept open to avoid constriction of the throat on higher tones, which will result in a pinched or strained vocal quality, and to allow resonance of the harmonics that add brilliance to the voice. Since all parts tune to the lead, it is essential that she possess an accurate sense of pitch.

Finally, since the lead sings the melody, she is the one responsible for conveying the interpretation, emotion and inflection of the song. The other three parts literally "follow her lead" in delivery of dynamics and tempo, and support her inflection, artistry and finesse.

Baritone

The baritone is the other one of the two middle voice parts in barbershop music- a harmony part sung both 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 sometimes up to bb' or b'.

Though the baritone and lead sing in the same basic range, the techniques for singing the two parts are quite different. Unlike the lead, the baritone voice should never be clearly identifiable. The baritone sings throughout her range with less 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 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 a minimum of vibrato.

The range of the baritone part requires use of all the pharyngeal areas for resonance. The soft palate must be kept open to avoid constriction of the throat on higher tones.

Finally, the baritone must have a good ear so that she can tune to the chord. Like tenors, baritones frequently sing the thirds and sevenths of a chord- the two tones that require the greatest degree of pitch adjustment from the equally tempered scale. These notes must be "tuned" so that chords will lock. The baritone is sometimes described as "singing the leftovers," or "singing the missing note." The tenor sings the highest note in a chord, the bass the lowest, the lead the melody, and the baritone sings the all-important missing note.

Bass

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 heavier production than that used by the upper voices, and she will actually sing with more volume than used by any part above her. The harmonic structure of barbershop music assists the bass in providing a firm foundation for the sound by giving her either the root or the fifth of each chord; other tones may occasionally be given to her in passing, or for special effects. Ideally, the bass and lead work as a team; the lead sings the melody, and the bass provides the harmonic foundation.

The bass sings mostly in her lower register (chest voice) with a rich, full, broad tone that has clarity and focus. She needs to maintain an open soft palate for proper resonance of tones in the higher portion of her range, where her quality needs to be lighter and more lead-like. The bass sings a relatively straight tone, with a minimum of vibrato. The range of the bass part is comparable to that of a contralto in traditional choral music.

Occasionally an arrangement will give the melody to the bass for a few isolated notes, for a phrase or for an entire verse. When this occurs, the bass adds sufficient color (vibrato) to her voice to make the melody easily identifiable and the lead sings more like a baritone.

Because the bass generally sings the root or fifth of the chord- the notes that do not require tuning- she need not be constantly aware of tuning her note to lock the chord. She must, however, be attuned to the lead to insure that those two parts are in tune with each other. If an accurate lead-bass relationship exists, the other two harmony parts will find it easy to tune, and to lock chords.))

Elements of the Bass-Driven Sound

- Rocket fuel of barbershop
- Driven without muscle or tension
- Rhythm keepers; bass drum
- Second lead
- Tall vowel
- Neutralizing vowels at range extremes
- Singing forward
- Singing cone of range
- Never as pianissimo as other parts
- Importance of camaraderie in sections
- Missionary riser placement

Lock and Ring:

Overtone structure; reinforcement of partials

Breath support

Open resonance

Blend and match of vowel resonance

Air and space

Clarity of tone

Accuracy

--Intervals

--Pitch

Lift off and float

Tuning octaves—high octave light and slightly sharp so that 5th can appear; 5th slightly sharp so third can appear. 7th—root and 7th need to be strong other parts sharp; swipe tuning especially important

Place in chord

Pythagorean tuning

Sparkling, ever-present lead line

Synch/unit

Balance

Place in chord

What can you do?

- Part Balance Golden mean—35%/35%/20%/10%
- Understand part placement in cone
- Understand cone of range
- Understand chord structure