

Vocal Production for Directors, Section Leaders, and Music Team

Developing tools for you and your singers' toolbox
HCNW, 2013

Course Objectives

- To give directors, assistant directors, and other musical leaders a different perspective on vocal production and to provide tools for the teaching thereof
- Identify and explore the most common problem areas of our singers
- Explore ways to prepare for successful rehearsals, sectionals, or PVI's

Vocal Skills

- Posture (a.k.a. alignment)
- Breathing
- Phonation
- Resonation
- Articulation

Back to breath

Most of our singers' issues stem from some type of issue with breath. We must constantly, vigilantly, and creatively find ways to remind all to think about it:

- *inhalation
- *exhalation (singing!)
- *through the phrase/phrase ends

**Our eyes are as valuable as our ears in assessing what's happening vocally. Always keep an eye on posture, positioning of feet, action during breathing, and at phrase ends to see that the instrument is being kept in optimal position—this takes great athleticism and focus on the part of every singer!!!

The power of the passaggio

Every voice has transition areas (the *passaggio*-literally, the "bridge" between registers) and it is in these spots that most of our singers falter. Simply knowing the voice is approaching an area where it might crack/be less than optimal causes many of our singers (at all levels!) tremendous stress and tension. It is important to note the common places most singers experience transitions:

	Tenor	Lead	Baritone	Bass
Men:	F#-A	E-F#	D-F#	C-E-flat
Women:	B-flat-D	G-B-flat	F-B-flat	E-flat-G

Prepare

-Warm-ups vs. Skill Building

-Make time to focus on the instrument (start of rehearsal, sectional, PVI)

We use our bodies differently when we sing than the other parts of our day (which for most, is the majority!). Be sure that your singers are ready to sing, using their bodies to ensure optimal singing.

-Have a plan

Plan your vocal exercises and know exactly what you want to accomplish with each. Also be certain you know the specific purpose(s) of each exercise. Be able to demonstrate a variety of productions or have someone on your team ready to help. When time is limited, be sure to plan how the entire time will be spent, allowing for questions/wrap-up at the end.

-Listen and study

As much as possible, we need to develop an aural picture of the sound we want to hear. For some, this means listening to recordings of good/high-level groups to get that sound in our ears. Directors, we need to take the time to work through each part, knowing how they should sound independently and in relation to one another. This preparation will also help to know where trouble areas are in each voice part.

Play!

Remember, we are working with adult learners who have a variety of learning styles. It is our responsibility to be sure we speak to each (aural, visual, and kinesthetic) and we should always plan to do so.

-Use props/white board/projector/computer

-Get their bodies involved: BIG MUSCLES WIN!!!

- *3D Breath/Wrap a butt

- *Air elevator

- *Raggedy Ann/Andy

- *Coordinated onset

- *Tuning fingers

Bibliography/Suggested Reading

Conable, Barbara, *The Structures and Movement of Breathing*, 2000, Gia Publications, Chicago, IL.

Doscher, Barbara, *The Functional Unity of the Singing Voice*, Second Edition, 1994, Scarecrow Press, London

McKinney, James, *The Diagnosis and Correction of Vocal Faults*, 2005, Waveland Press, Long Grove, IL

Miller, Richard, *The Structure of Singing*, 1986, Schirmer, New York, NY.

Seelig, Timothy, *The Perfect Blend*, 2005, Shawnee Press, Inc.

Vennard, William, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Tehnic*, Revised edition, 1968, Carl Fischer Inc., New York, NY.

Barbershop Harmony Society, *Contest and Judging Handbook*, March, 2013.

Sweet Adelines International, *Judging Category Description Book*, Rev. 2012.

Pride of Portland

PVI Team, 2012

Ten most common problems of singers

- Poor posture
- Poor breathing/breath support
- Onset: glottal or breathy
- Poor tone quality (generally due to tension/muscle)
- Limited range/difficulty in passaggio
- Lack of flexibility, agility, ease of production, endurance/stamina
- Poor articulation (overdone or “squishy”)
- Poor health, hygiene, vocal abuse
- Poor self-image, lack of confidence
- Lack of discipline

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 highest 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!!