

## SPS: Singing the right note

Listening to Paul trying to get us to build up a very complicated jazzy chord at the end of Moon Glow the other day, made me think, how do we hear the right note to sing? Is there a way to practise this?

- Part of it is listening very carefully to the note on the piano or a practice track and matching your voice to the sound. Can you hear when you are under or over the right note?
- Part of it is hearing the note you just sang before and getting the right relationship between this and the next note.
- In some music you will just get a sense of what is the right note.
- It is also possible to learn some common note sequences (or “intervals”), going up and down and associate this with a tune you know. It helps to know the notes in a classical scale. Can you sing a
  - Semitone (the closest interval: ↑ **I’m dream**-ing of a white Christmas; ↓ **Joy to** the world...)
  - Tone (↑ **Doh a deer**; ↓ **Yes-ter**-day)
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> (↑ **Oh when** the saints; ↓ **Swing low** sweet chariot)
  - 4<sup>th</sup> (↑ **A-way** in a manger; ↓ Oh **come all** ye faithful)
  - 5<sup>th</sup> (↑ Baa **baa black** sheep; ↓ **Flint stones**...)
  - 6<sup>th</sup> (↑ **My Bonn**-y lies over the ocean; ↓ **No bod**-y knows the trouble I see)
  - 7<sup>th</sup> (↑ **There’s a** place for us, from West Side Story; ↓??)
  - Octave (↑ **Some-where** over the rainbow; ↓ High on a **hill was** a lonely goatherd)
- Remember, for bigger intervals or ones that are high up in your range, you need to have good breath control and good

support for your tone to sing in tune (think of breath supported through your abdominal muscles)

- Also, to sing in tune, get the right tilt in your vocal folds. Think of a posh-sounding sob for a higher note. Feel the vibration in your chest for a lower note.

[ A quick explanation of “voices” in singing, relating to where the tone or resonance comes from.

- Head voice: the resonating spaces are above the soft palate in the mouth and you may feel it behind your eyes and in your sinuses.
- Middle/mix voice (or singing “in the mask”). You may feel it in the bone structure around your cheeks and nasal passages. Try singing ‘ng’ to feel it.
- Chest voice gives resonance for lower notes. You can feel the vibration physically if you put a hand on your chest.

And a couple of extras:

- Falsetto, when male singers need to make a radical shift of gear to hit notes beyond their normal register (think BeeGees)
- Whistle voice, when sopranos need to sing stratospherically high. Amateur sopranos have to work hard to prevent this being squeaky, but professional opera singers can do it.
- N.B there may be an audible sound difference or stutter as you shift between voices. This is called your “break” or in Italian, “passagio”]

### **A dilemma for tenors**

In SPS, we are lucky to have a healthy number of tenors, made up of a mixture of men and women. The thing to remember when

pitching notes is that men may have to use a different strategy from women.

Your most comfortable range for singing is related to the pitch of your speaking voice. So:

- Female tenors will need to sing at a pitch going lower than their speaking voice. They will need to engage chest voice (more vibration) to get lower notes. Female tenors' hardest task is often to get enough tone in the lower register. They may be singing more quietly than their male colleagues. A technique for female tenors to try is to go for resonance in the "mask" in the face or behind the nose on 'ng'.
- Male tenors will take their pitch significantly higher than their speaking voice, so will need particularly good breath support for higher notes. They will be engaging predominantly middle voice and head voice or even "falsetto" for very high notes. Less experienced tenors may find it harder to hear the pitch in this higher range. Also male tenors may seem to be singing louder to maintain head voice easily and their voices will stand out more.
- So the dilemma for a mixed tenor section is to maintain a reasonable blend of sound between males and females.

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