

VOCAL LESSON #5

FUNDAMENTALS OF BARBERSHOP

The barbershop style is four-part a cappella harmony. In both male and female barbershop choruses and quartets, the four parts are lead, bass, baritone and tenor. Barbershop harmony is a combination of several characteristics unique to the style, such as chord structure (arrangement), the cone-shaped sound, delivery (vocal energy) and interpretation. These are integral factors which contribute to the "lock-and-ring" characteristic of singing in the barbershop style.

Barbershop Arrangements

Barbershop harmony makes frequent use of the major and minor triads, the dominant seventh and dominant ninth chords. The melody is carried primarily by the lead voice, while the highest voice sings a harmony part. The lowest voice sings a strong chord component and no chord tone is omitted throughout the arrangement. Non-harmonic tones, passing tones and non-chords are outside the scope of barbershop harmony.

Energized Vocal Line

Energy is an intangible quality - it's something we can sense and feel, but it is difficult to describe. An above-average barbershop performance has a sound possessing energy. A significant amount of that energy is derived from proper breath support, but a certain amount can also be attributed to a positive, confident mental attitude and to the quality of "life" imparted to the voice by a lifted facial countenance and singer's posture.

To convey the essence of the barbershop performance to the listener, singers must:

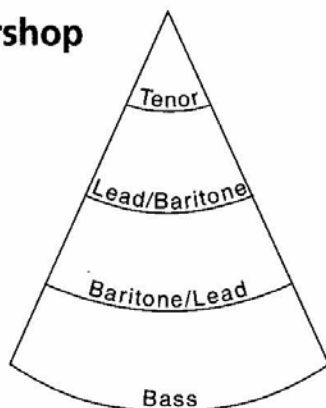
1. Permit breath to be managed in such a way that the vocal line demonstrates vitality and life.
2. Put "heart" into her voice, using it artistically to convey sincere feeling for the message of the song. Without heart, emotion and energy, a mechanically perfect performance can be achieved but there will be no aesthetic beauty and no thrill for either the audience or the musician.

Balance

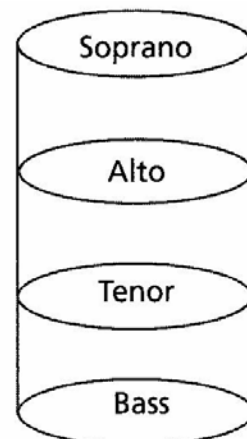
Barbershop chords have different balance requirements than SATB (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) chords. In SATB chords, all parts are given the same vocal intensity and weight. In barbershop, the bass is the foundation of the chord and sings with great depth; the lead and baritone have less depth and more clarity; and the tenor sings light and with great clarity on top of the chord (similar to snow on the mountain peak). This unique balance is called coning.

Below are examples of the proper balance of a barbershop chord and SATB chord:

Barbershop



SATB



Balance, continued

When the baritone sings below the lead, she needs to sing with a richer, broader tone more like a bass, and the lead needs to sing with a clear confident tone. When the baritone sings above the lead, she needs to lighten her tone, and the lead needs to sing with a broader, and still confident tone. Basses and tenors also need to learn to cone as they go into either the higher or lower parts of their ranges. If a chord is out-of-balance, one (or more) of the parts are not properly "coning."

Steps in the Barbershop Style

- Sing all the right notes and words - together!
- Sing all the notes in tune.
- Sing with correct vocal techniques and proper barbershop balance (coning).
- Pronounce words, primarily vowels, in the same way - together!
- Develop a barbershop style through phrasing and interpretation.
- Develop suitable dynamics (shading, nuances, word inflection).
- Sing the lyrics expressively - using consonants to add artistic inflection and finesse— together!
- Enhance the music by executing the visual presentation as a unit - together!
- Remember, every member of a barbershop chorus is a valued and vital ingredient to the total performance, vocally and visually.

The ultimate in the musical performance is achieved when the performer reaches out at the beginning of the performance, takes the audience in the palm of the hand and holds it there until the performance has concluded, keeping each listener totally spellbound by the emotional impact achieved.

AND FINALLY ...

Excerpts from an article "Reasons for Studying Singing" by Van A. Cristy, William C. Brown Company Publishers:

"In a world of political, economic and personal chaos, music is not a luxury but a necessity, not simply because it is the "universal language," but because, it is the persistent focus of man's intelligence, aspiration and good will. Music is an excellent insurance for any young person."

"No student ever wastes her time in a voice culture class, even though he never becomes a soloist. He is sure to carry away with her a stronger, more serviceable body as a result of her serious study of singing, for the physical requirements necessary for good tone production are conducive to good health. The student is taught correct posture, abdominal development, chest development, and breath control."

"Singing fortifies health, widens culture, refines the intelligence, enriches the imagination, makes for happiness and endows life with an added zest."