

## VOCAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOUR VOICE PARTS

We will begin by saying that it is expected that all four parts should work to exhibit a freely produced, well-resonated sound. We all know what a healthy voice sounds like.

1. There is ease to the sound.
2. The sound resonates in more than one dimension.
3. The movement of the voice is liquid.
4. There is a “ring” or sparkle that denotes joy.

In our own Judging Category Description Book under Vocal Skills states: Although each voice has certain distinctive qualities, all well-produced voices share the following general characteristics:

1. The voice has consistency, with a seemingly even tone quality from the lowest register to the highest.
2. The voice has both ring, giving a sense of focus to the sound, and roundness, emanating from a throat that is open and free from tension.
3. The voice has energy, and words flow smoothly.
4. The voice is free from tension and has warmth and color.
5. The voice is flexible and capable of a wide variety of dynamics.

I look for these characteristics in all voice parts. But, you are assigned to a particular section because the “sweet spot” in your voice is where that voice part spends a majority of time. Let’s break it down and speak of each part and the characteristics that make it special.

## INDIVIDUAL VOICE PARTS

**LEAD:** The lead voice generally carries the melody so she must sing with musical authority. The ideal lead voice has clarity,

brilliance, depth, maturity, and a sense of style that sets her voice apart from the other three. She sings with a sufficient amount of color to add interest to the tone but never so much as to distort the locked chord characteristics of the barbershop style.

The lead sings in approximately the same range as an alto (“g” below middle “c” to “d” in the second octave above middle “c”), and while much of her vocal authority comes from utilizing the lower chest register, she must be able to execute a smooth transition between the lower and the upper registers so that quality remains consistent between the extremes of her range. The lead voice should also be capable of a wide range of expressive dynamics.

## **COMMON BALANCE PROBLEMS**

Leads often sing their part with equal weight and intensity, no matter what their position in the chord or in what portion of their range the note lies. The resultant problem depends on the capabilities of the other sections. If other sections are strong, the leads will probably appear to be in balance on higher notes and under balanced on lows. If the other sections are weak, the leads will probably appear to be in balance on lower note and over balanced on highs. Leads must remember that the approach to singing in the barbershop style requires more depth of tone and more volume on lows and a light, more lyrical tone quality with less relative volume on highs-an approach exactly opposite to that used in classical singing.

When the melody leaves the lead voice, traditional balance is abandoned and the quality and authority normally found in the lead voice are transferred to the voice singing the melody. The sound judge will evaluate the degree of proficiency with which these melodic transfers are handled and subsequently balanced.

Leads assume the main responsibility for the emotional content of the words. Everyone is responsible for knowing the plan and executing the word sounds. Enunciation in singing has

been identified as the manner of pronouncing words clearly and distinctly. In reality, enunciation involves articulation, but they are not the same. Articulation refers to the physical process involved in the method of manner of enunciating any utterance, either speaking or singing, whereas, pronunciation means uttering or articulating words or sounds in the required or standard manner. Articulation relates to the physical use of the vocal mechanism, pronunciation relates to propriety of sound produced, and enunciation deals with the clarity of sound produced.

Leads give “face” to the story of the music. Their part is the one the audience will zero in on. The other three parts must be in the same mood or attitude but the lead carries the burden of being the spokeswoman.

From inside the quartet, it is the Lead’s job to lead. She must, with her voice indicate the ebb and flow of the phrases—the entrances and exits, the turn of the diphthongs and the eloquent use of the consonants to enhance the emotion of the song. She is really in charge of attacks and releases much as the directors in the chorus setting.

### **KIM HULBERT—THE PART SHOP—2005**

1. The lead part is predominant because of the voice quality, not because of the volume she sings. Based on volume alone, the loudest note in each chord would be the lowest, usually the bass.
2. The lead must learn to be adept at what is considered a mixed-voice register that allows for access to both head and chest simultaneously. Shifts between registers have a profound impact on unit and tuning.
3. It is not necessary for the lead to take audible breaths in order for the harmony parts to know when to start and stop. Audible breaths require tension in the instrument in order to be heard and will negatively impact the beginning sound (onset) of any singer. Harmony parts singers will learn to

- start with the Lead from experience if there is consistency of timing between the pitch and the onset of singing.
4. Leads share in the responsibility for tuning. All parts are required to tune chords. The melody line is often more concerned with maintaining tonal center, which results in a higher percentage of tuned chords but must, on occasion, be aware of unusual tuning requirements because of chorus choices or chord voicing.
  5. Leads do have to sing “in the cone” and balance chords. In barbershop harmony lower notes have to be more “present” no matter the overall dynamic of the chord and not matter what part is singing them. Particular problems for leads are on higher notes when singing a whole step away from the tenor (in chopsticks).
  6. If the lead demonstrates the dynamics at all times she will probably cause frequent balance problems and overall sing too loud. Harmony parts should learn the plan themselves and apply it to their own parts keeping in mind the issue of chord balance.
  7. Leads do not technically work on blending with the other parts. Their job is to produce a tone with which the harmony parts can blend—a blendable quality.
  8. Although it is technically true that leads don’t have to match vowels, the harmony parts depend on the lead to produce a vowel that is truthful to the word sung and that is fully resonated. Until coached otherwise, harmony parts should accept the lead vowel as the appropriate sound.
  9. Leads do not have to be able to sing harmony. Quartet leads may be able to get by on the issue if the harmony parts are willing to make allowances but most choruses require some harmony singing from the lead section.
  10. Not only Leads are responsible for the emotional selling of the song—it takes all four parts. No matter who conceives the interpretive ideas—the Lead specifically, the quartet as a whole, a coach or a chorus director—all must perform it with

equal commitment. An important note—most leads cannot truly perform and become emotionally committed to a song or message they do not believe or support.

## **SING YOUR PART SMART DALE SYVERSON 1999**

Lead: It's not a Part---It's an Attitude

The lead part is so much more than the melody. Leads must approach the part with abandon as well as artistry. They need to be confident and consistent while maintaining a sound that supports the ring (overtone quality) of the group's sound.

A good lead...

- ❖ Resonates her high notes as well and completely as her low notes
- ❖ Is skilled in the use of appropriate vocal color...using it artistically to enhance the beauty of the lyrics and melodic line while maintaining her proper place in the barbershop sound and cone
- ❖ Add width and strength to her sound as she approaches and descends below middle C
- ❖ Knows how to interact with the other parts to enhance the continuity of the melody line
- ❖ Keeps her sound three dimensional at all times
- ❖ Knows that she has a unique relationship with the baritone, sharing the entire middle of every chord in the barbershop contest song. (The only exception to this being the infrequent voicing of the tenor below the lead). This unique relationship with the bari requires that both lead and bari sing equally solid and complete vocal lines.
- ❖ Realizes the importance of equally strong head tone and chest tone, ultimately being able to mix registers throughout her range

- ❖ Is skilled at the full range of barbershop embellishments...from finesse to power
- ❖ Understands the tuning issues and relationship between lead and each of the other three parts
- ❖ Realizes the need for constant vocal energy
- ❖ Realizes the importance of vocal flexibility
- ❖ Doesn't need to sing loud to sing with energy
- ❖ Maintains the dimension of her sound:
  - Moving through the register break
  - Moving through dynamic changes, especially decrescendo
  - Moving through difficult intervals, ascending and descending
  - At any tempo and using any rhythm.

## **TENOR:**

The tenor voice has a lightness and quality, an almost bell like clarity, and sufficient maturity of sound to complement the lower voices, particularly the lead voice. Since the tenor part is sung primarily above the lead, this voice must be capable of singing high notes with consistent quality and control. Though the tenor sings in a range comparable to that of a soprano, the tenor part is sung with a lighter vocal adjustment and with much less vibrato than that used to sing soprano. The average voice range for tenor is "e" above middle "c" to "g" in the second octave above middle "c".

## **COMMON BALANCE PROBLEMS FOR TENORS**

Frequently the tenor voice or section sings with a heavy quality lending too much weight to the top of the chord. A tenor or tenor section whose quality does not complement that of the lower voices will generally appear to be out of balance. Conversely, when the tenor part line goes below the lead line

momentarily, tenors fail to make the vocal adjustment required to fill the chord completely.

The expression judge must recognize that correctly produced vowels all modify toward a neutral vowel at highest pitches. As pitch rises, for example, “ee” takes on the quality of “ih”, and “ah” modifies toward “uh”; and attempt by the singer to keep the vowel from modifying will result in a pinched, improperly produced tones. Because of the range involved in Sweet Adeline music, this phenomenon is generally experienced by the tenor and only in the highest portion of her range. Vowels that are modified naturally will not result in discernible distortion of blend or unit sound.

## **THOUGHTS ON SINGING TENOR CHARLA ESSER--PART SHOP 2005**

### **A Great Singer / Performer**

- ❖ Uses her body properly to give her sound wings!
- ❖ Uses her internal focus.
- ❖ Explores freedom from thinking while performing.
- ❖ Allows herself to experience what is natural.
- ❖ Sings from her soul.
- ❖ Isn't afraid to let the world inside.
- ❖ Is open to change.
- ❖ Explores new ways of thinking and doing.
- ❖ Knows that she is always in the process of growing.

## **RESONANCE, BREATH AND PHONATION**

The 3-way partnership that every singer/performer must master.

Resonance is required for vocal beauty and power.  
It is created by the singer's free and open vocal space.

Breath is required for vocal beauty and power.

It is the result of a free and relaxed vocal instrument that understands that breathing is the management of air, not simply sheer lung capacity. Many bad vocal habits are efforts for protection against clumsy management of breath.

Breath phonation is required for vocal beauty and power.  
Phonation is the creation of sound.

Starting all vocal sounds on air that is freely produced and supported is fundamental to all great singing.

The result of a mastery of resonance, breath, and phonation is the ability to create sound that has both spin and ring.

Spin: a tone, which spins, is unencumbered and unforced, free and continuous.

Ring: a complex system of high frequency overtones produced by brilliance and projection with a relaxed vocal mechanism.

TENOR: From the Top of the Mountain...

The tenor part occupies the top of the barbershop chord... with the infrequent exception or singing below the lead for a few chords. This puts the tenor singer in a similar situation with the basses, forming the “frame” around the two parts (lead and baritone) weaving between them.

A good tenor:

- ❖ Is aware of her responsibility within the overtone series to create a sound conducive to perpetuating and enhancing the overtone “stack”
- ❖ Is aware of the location of octaves (and which part is on the other end of that octave) in every song
- ❖ Resonates her high notes as well and as completely as her low notes
- ❖ Sings her part with melodic confidence



- ❖ Knows the lead line almost as well as she knows her own, enabling her to anticipate her relationship to the lead within the cone as she sings
- ❖ Keeps her sound three dimensional at all times
- ❖ Knows that she must sing “down into” the sound below her while maintaining her life and ring
- ❖ Realizes the importance of equally strong head tone and chest tone, ultimately being able to mix registers to provide the vocal strength necessary to balance the chord when she is below the lead
- ❖ Is skilled at the full range of barbershop embellishment., from finesse to power
- ❖ Understands the tuning issues and relationship between tenor and each of the other three parts
- ❖ Realizes the need for constant vocal energy
- ❖ Realizes the importance of vocal flexibility
- ❖ Doesn't need to sing loud to sing with energy
- ❖ Maintains the dimension of her sound:
  - Moving through the register break, ascending and descending
  - Moving through dynamic changes, especially decrescendo
  - Moving through difficult intervals, ascending and descending
  - At any tempo and using any rhythm
- ❖ Thinks her part IS the melody.

**BASS:** The bass voice must also be able to sing with authority, for she provides the foundation for the barbershop sound. The barbershop arranger assists her by providing a strong chord tone, usually the root of the fifth. Although no comparable voice part exists in female choral music, the bass sings a range comparable to that used by a contralto or second alto (“c” below middle “c” to “f” above middle “c”). The bass voice must have a mellow, melodic quality, with sufficient weight to add the desirable bass timbre to the overall sound. She must be capable of sufficient volume and projection on the lowest tones so that her sound is not obscured by the higher voice parts. Her vocal quality must complement that of the lead voice.

## **THE POWER OF BARBERSHOP**

The bass part occupies the bottom of every barbershop chord. The “lock and ring” we all strive for are impossible without the skillful execution of a bass line rich in overtones.

A good bass...

- ❖ Resonates her high notes as well and as completely as her low notes
- ❖ Has learned to love head tone, because strength in and skillful use of this part of her voice greatly enhances her ability to produce overtones
- ❖ Maintains her flexibility and overall artistry in the lower third of her range by maintaining a gentle lift of the soft palate
- ❖ Sings her part with melodic authority
- ❖ Skillfully positions her part in every chord to accommodate the other three parts in her overtone series
- ❖ Learns to sing “weightless” descending intervals
- ❖ Keeps her sound three dimensional at all times
- ❖ Realizes the importance of equally strong head tone and chest tone, ultimately being able to mix registers throughout her range

- ❖ Is skillful at the full ranges of barbershop embellishments...from finesse to power
- ❖ Understands the tuning issues and relationships between bass and each of the other three parts
- ❖ Realizes the need for constant vocal energy
- ❖ Realizes the importance of vocal flexibility
- ❖ Doesn't need to sing loud to sing with energy, realizing that loudness and artistry are not synonymous
- ❖ Knows that really powerful bass is a combination of energy (at all volume levels), resonance, and the ability to produce overtones
- ❖ Maintains the dimension of her sound:
  - Moving through the register break, ascending and descending
  - Moving through dynamic changes, especially decrescendo
  - Moving through difficult intervals, ascending and descending
  - At any tempo and using any rhythms
- ❖ Thinks her part IS the melody.

### **COMMON BALANCE PROBLEMS:**

The most common bass balance problem is the inability to balance low tones properly. Because of the vocal range of the bass part, it is necessary for the basses to sing with more depth and volume as they descend in pitch. This problem is magnified when the group loses overall pitch. Conversely, the upper part of the bass range requires use of the head register for proper resonance.

### **BASS CONSIDERATIONS-PEGGY GRAM-PART SHOP 2005**

1. Breath support is the life of the bass sound.
  - A. Breathing
    - i. Body posture promotes ease in breathing
    - ii. The process
    - iii. Rib cage vs. abdominals

- iv. Facial involvement
  - v. Body involvement
- B. Breath tempo
  - i. Breath without tension
  - ii. Start and stop without tension
  - iii. Timing sets up next phrase
- 2. Conscious understanding of vocal space on intake of air and its correlation to quality and resonance of sound produced.
- 3. The effective bass voice maintains quality of sound throughout all areas of her voice range
  - A. Relationship between parts
    - i. Bass is the loudest, but pushed doesn't make overtones
    - ii. Octaves with tenors
    - iii. Relationship to lead
    - iv. Interaction with baritone
    - v. Counterpoint with other parts
    - vi. Unisons
    - vii. Major seconds and tritons
- 4. Quality bass is never over sung or pushed. The sound has clarity, focus and consistent ring.
- 5. Bass is always resonated in the top half of the mouth, no matter how high or low the pitch.
- 6. The bass has huge responsibility for maintaining tonality for the group.
  - A. Maintains "do"
  - B. Sets up overtone pattern for other singers
  - C. Singing with space for other parts
  - D. Tempo
- 7. The bass takes responsibility for overtone quality in all octave relationships
  - A. Vowel to vowel singing

- B. Target vowel sound definition
- C. Rhythmic patterns don't impinge on sound
- D. Diphthongs
- E. Circle phrases out rather than back

## Tuning

- A. Clean intervals
- B. Stylization
- C. Scale steps 2,3,6,7,higher
- D. Accidental rule
- E. Major 2nds
- F. Octaves
- G. Chromatics and half steps
- H. Repeated notes within passages

- 8. Bass is second only to lead in need for enunciation skill.
- 9. The effective bass voice maintains quality of sound throughout all rhythmic patterns.

- A. Synchronization
  - i. Flexibility through relaxation
  - ii. Role of lift
  - iii. Breathing together
  - iv. Horizontal entrance into phrases
  - v. Inflections
  - vi. Exercises

- B. Swipes
  - i. Power swipes
    - 1. Bass in motion
    - 2. Bass holding with other parts in motion
  - ii. Finesse Swipes
    - 1. textures
    - 2. who leads swipes
    - 3. muscle vs. overtone

iii. Performance aspects

1. facial involvement
2. avoid stereotypes
3. body involvement
4. where you stand in relationship to other parts

Bass traps:

Lower/Slower

Softer/Slower

Dudley Do Right Spot

General heaviness to sound

Incorrect preconceived notions.

**BARITONE—**

The baritone voice provides the important fourth tone of the chord and must be flexible in vocal quality. She sings in approximately the same range as the lead (“f” below middle “c” to “b” above middle “c”) but with less authority. In most arrangements she sings in the lower portion of her range more frequently than in the upper. Although consistency of quality between upper and lower registers is always desirable, it is less important here than in the lead voice, for the baritone actually sings with what appears to be two voices. When her position in the chord is below the lead, she sings with a depth of tone that fills the gap between the lead and bass; when her position in the chord is above the lead, her quality becomes more like that of a tenor. Vocal flexibility and appropriate handling of the intricacies of the baritone part play an important role in achieving the lock and ring characteristic of the barbershop sound.

## BARITONE: The Chameleon Harmony Part of Barbershop

] The baritone part occupies a unique place in the barbershop sound. The baritone and lead in combination are the entire middle of every chord in the barbershop contest song. (The only exception to this being the infrequent voicing of the tenor below the lead). This unique relationship with the lead requires that both bari and lead sing equally solid and complete vocal lines.

A good baritone...

- ❖ Resonates her high notes as well and completely as her low notes
- ❖ Tries to “lose” herself in the sound of her quartet (chorus), especially her lead section
- ❖ Sings her part with melodic confidence
- ❖ Knows the lead line almost as well as she knows her own, enabling her to anticipate her relationship to the lead within the cone as she sings
- ❖ Keeps her sound three dimensional at all times
- ❖ Uses her register break to good advantage, positioning her vocal line and color to fill between lead/tenor (lighter) or lead/bass (fuller) with the appropriate sound
- ❖ Realizes the importance of equally strong head tone and chest tone, ultimately being able to mix registers throughout her range
- ❖ Is skilled at the full ranges of barbershop embellishments...from finesse to power
- ❖ Understands the tuning issues and relationship between baritone and each of the other three parts
- ❖ Realizes the need for constant vocal energy
- ❖ Realizes the importance of vocal flexibility
- ❖ Doesn't need to sing loud to sing with energy, realizing that loudness and artistry are not synonymous
- ❖ Knows that really powerful bass is a combination of energy (at all volume levels), resonance, and the ability to produce overtones
- ❖ Maintains the dimension of her sound:

- Moving through the register break, ascending and descending
  - Moving through dynamic changes, especially decrescendo
  - Moving through difficult intervals, ascending and descending
  - At any tempo and using any rhythms
- ❖ Thinks her part IS the melody.



## **COMMON BALANCE PROBLEMS FOR BARITONE**

The most common baritone balance problem is similar to that of leads, except that baritones tend to sing most comfortable, and therefore, with most strength in the middle of their voice range. The baritone cannot rely only on her position in her overall range to indicate the volume or intensity required; her balance is also contingent upon her proximity to the lead note and whether she is above or below the lead. Baritones frequently sing many consecutive notes of the same pitch, while the lead moves between positions above and below the unchanging baritone note. It is the job of the baritone to adjust her balance within each chord, even though her note remains the same. When she sings below the lead, in the lower portion of her range, good balance requires that she sing with more depth of tone than would be used by the lead on that same pitch. When she is above the lead, in the upper portion of her range, good balance dictates that she sing with a lighter tone than would be used by the lead on that same pitch.



## **LIFE AS A BARITONE -- THE PART SHOP 2005 DALE SYVERSON**

Singing baritone is about:

- ❖ Sounding like yourself
- ❖ Presenting your voice in a vocal line of artistry and finesse
- ❖ Understanding your contribution to the sound of the barbershop chord and
- ❖ Contributing equally (along with the other three parts) to all aspects of accuracy, synchronization, coning and balance, ring and spin and resonation.

### **THE CHALLENGES OF SINGING BARITONE**

The baritone is the only harmony part with a distinctly special relationship to the lead. The two parts share exactly the same range and are the entire middle of almost every chord. The exception being when the tenor sings below the lead.

That knowledge leads us to the need for sharing the exact same singing space as the lead. Many baritones believe they share the responsibility for the depth of the ensemble sound with the basses. Actually, the bass shares this responsibility with whichever of the two middle parts is lower in the chord.

The baritone, like all harmony parts, should strive to sing her vocal line with melodic confidence. She should always be aware of unusual intervals, whether large, ascending, bizarre (frequently heralded by accidentals), or any combination of these circumstances. If the unusual demands are not made a smooth part of the baritone's vocal line, there can easily be a loss of horizontal flow and singing space, frequently resulting in synchronization or tuning errors or both.

The baritone should know the lead part almost as well as her own. This will result in an increased ability to weave her sound with the lead into a solid unit that then becomes much easier to balance and cone.

### **BARITONE: RELATING TO THE OTHER PARTS**

The baritone needs to be alert for opportunities to enhance the vocal relationship with each of the other parts. She should look for:

**Major seconds:** These should be sung with a vocal approach that varies with the part she is paired with, matching the vowel, volume and singing spaced of that other part. When executed correctly the Major 2

- ❖ With the tenor (generally in the upper third of baritone ranges) adds excitement to the sound of the ensemble;
- ❖ With the lead (generally in midrange for both voices) adds warmth and width to the sound of the ensemble, especially if there are a number of them in sequence;
- ❖ With the bass...well, this doesn't happen very often. When it does it's usually one chord in passing, always interesting, frequently part of a challenging vocal line for one or both parts and is most often found in an embellishment at or close to the climax of the song. But be sure to watch carefully for them hidden in ordinary vocal lines.

**Bari/Lead Tradeoffs:** These are successive chords where the bari and lead swap the same notes back and forth. Each of the chords (lead/bari) in this kind of vocal line should sound and tune exactly the same.

**Creative use of Register Break:** Opportunities to use her register break (assuming she has one) to advantage, allowing the natural lightness of head register to assist in balance/coning issues when above the lead and at all times resisting the urge to take chest register inappropriately above her register break.

**Octaves:** One of the most basic intervals and a serious "tool" for tuning. Most often, the baritone will be the top of the octave with the bass. She must position her sound with the spin of the bass sound and become the bass overtone...making her a conduit to (and through) the spin and ring of the tenor sound.

When the baritone is the bottom of an octave with either the lead or the tenor, she is required to (establish and ) maintain the ring and spin of her sound, just like a bass would, to define the singing space for the singer the octave above.

