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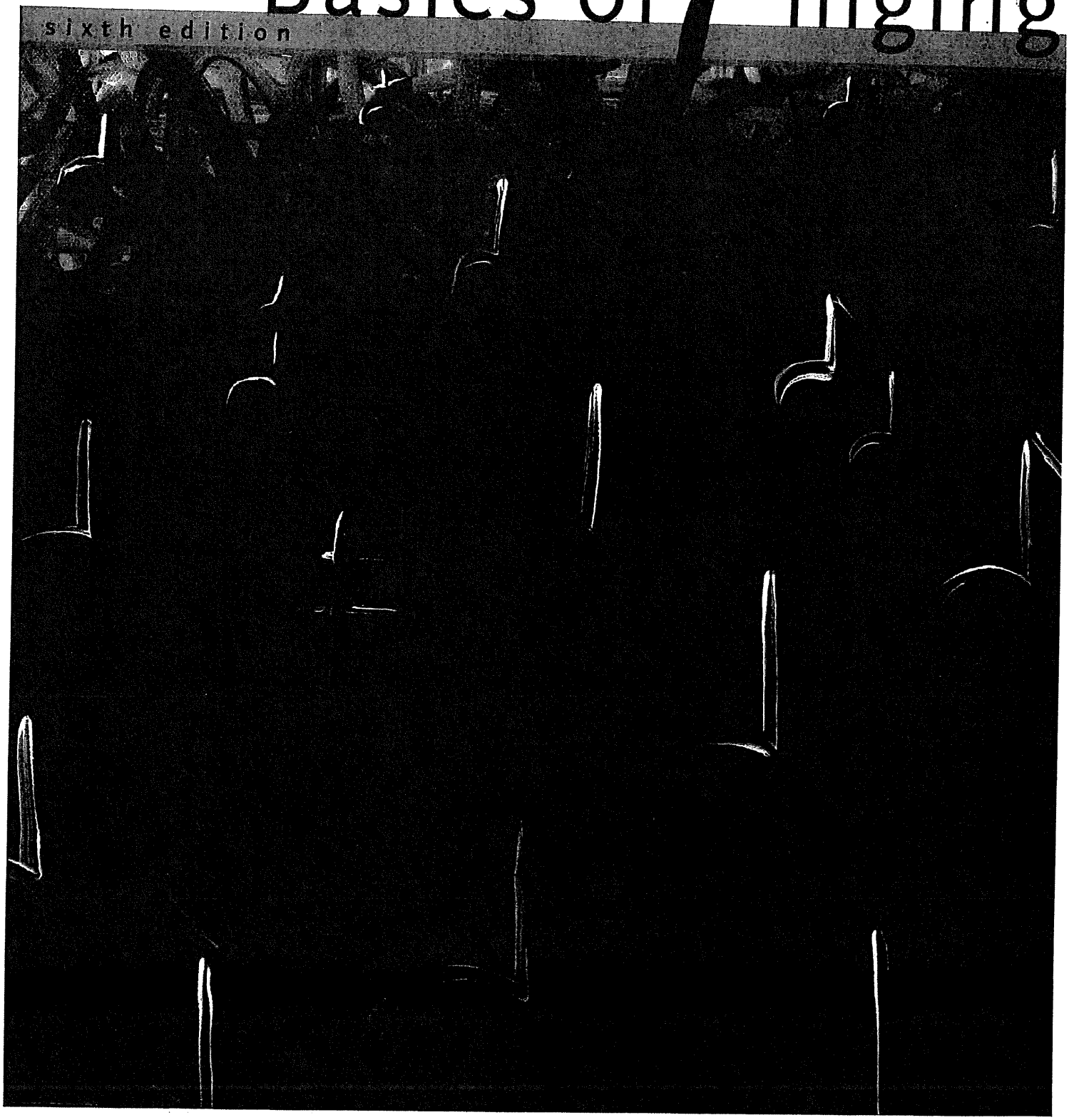
Basics of Singing

sixth edition



Part 1
Technique

Chapter 1

Practicing

Learning to sing is a slow and patient undertaking, in which a good ear is the prerequisite, the imagery is an aid supplied by the teacher, and the experience is gradually accumulated until it is so powerful that merely calling up the memory will reproduce it.

Slow, patient, and gradual

In his book *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic,* William Vennard wrote the foregoing quote, which seems to be as appropriate a statement to consider as any when a new singer begins a formalized study of singing. Perhaps the words ***slow, patient,*** and ***gradually*** should be capitalized. At least, they should be stressed in the student's mind, as should be the necessity of faith in the teacher. The teacher will tailor the suggestions made in this or any other text to a student's particular needs, making it considerably more valuable.

Singing is a learned skill, and all those with sufficient motivation and intelligence can improve their performance considerably if they commit themselves to it. When it is finally learned, singing is a comfortable and thoroughly enjoyable experience. It's more than that—it's exhilarating! But in the beginning, voice training can be confusing and sometimes excruciatingly embarrassing, emotions that eventually pass after enough performances have been sung. Students are asked to make sounds they cannot easily make, and when they are finally assured by the teacher that they are succeeding, they often dislike what they hear, or simply feel that a tone is strange. That is where the patience is required.

The slowness of learning to sing correctly refers to the great amount of experimentation the student needs to do, both under the teacher's supervision and, particularly, in private practice. Improving one's own singing is a never-ending project for most professionals and many amateurs. Mastering the basic skills for a "solid" singing technique for popular, theater, or classical music takes years, not months. It is similar to learning a new sport, in the sense that the coordination of numerous muscles is involved. Therefore, for some time, students should expect more

"misses" than "hits." When one also realizes that techniques for styling and presentation must be learned as well, an understanding of the size of the task begins to develop.

It should be mentioned, too, that one of the most common ways new voice students sabotage or eliminate progress is to lock themselves into singing only one style. Performance versatility is preferable—and definitely more useful—than singing "just country" or "just Broadway." The most basic vocal technique is the same for all styles of music. Stylistic differences are taught and learned after the foundation is laid.

Vary styles.

As students continue to work at building their singing voices, they gain a progressively clearer concept of what to expect from themselves. That this concept is aided enormously by the ear is obvious, but students also begin to recognize and memorize the physical sensations they experience when singing correctly. "Singing by feeling" is especially noticeable as they sing in more and more varied circumstances and the acoustics change with each room and situation.

Attention to Details

When to practice

In order to make adequate progress, the singer must practice carefully and consistently. Since, in such areas as lower jaw and throat positions, the student is often dealing with adjustments involving a fraction of an inch, it can readily be seen that concentration must be exclusively on singing. As many distractions as possible must be eliminated. If, at first, concentration does not extend beyond ten minutes, stop practicing! For without concentration, the beginning voice student will slip back into the familiar—and probably incorrect—manner of singing. It is better to do several short, concentrated practice sessions in a day than to do more lengthy, unfocused sessions.

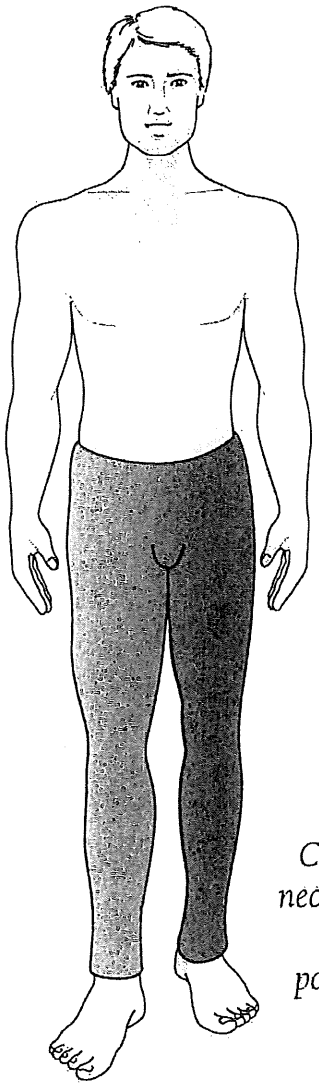
Where to practice

There are numerous approaches to teaching singing, and many can be successful, but most teachers would agree that practicing should be done in a solitary, quiet place, and always in a standing position. This means that practicing while driving in a car is not particularly helpful to voice building; neither is trying to sing quietly in an apartment or dormitory room. If practice facilities are unavailable, public buildings with pianos, such as churches, often are. And their proprietors are usually cooperative in letting students use rooms and instruments.

Good Singing Posture

Correct stance and foot position

The generally accepted stance for a good singing posture is as follows (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2): The feet should be planted firmly on the floor, slightly apart (approximately 12 inches, 300 mm), one slightly ahead of the other. The weight should be on the forward portion of the feet, to allow greater flexibility in breathing and also to create a more energetic impression when one sings for an audience.



Correct neck and head position

Figure 1.1
Correct stance for singing

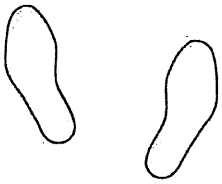


Figure 1.2
Foot position for singing

Figure 1.3
Head position for singing

The knees should be slightly bent, to allow the singer to stand as firmly as possible. It often happens that one is inadvertently pushed or bumped during a rehearsal or performance, and, to say nothing of the benefits good posture provides for good voice production, a secure stance is definitely to a singer's advantage.

Shoulders should be firmly back and down, neither tense nor drooping. A differentiation should be made here between this position and the extremely low shoulder position required of dancers.

Arms should hang at the sides in a very relaxed manner, slightly bent at the elbows. This bend creates a less militaristic look than perfectly straight arms.

The hands of new singing students often tend to express the nervousness they are feeling. Many people, therefore, find it helpful, particularly during lessons, to place the fingertips firmly on the sides of the thighs and to keep them there.

The neck should be relaxed both in front and in back and should not be turned even the slightest degree. Because of unconscious head movement, the neck is frequently stretched in various directions, so special attention should be given to guarding against this. It will prevent straining the muscles from which the voice box is suspended.

The head position (see Figure 1.3) should be determined by the focus of the eyes, which should be straight ahead. Being aware that the neck is relaxed will also help to ensure that the head is neither too far back nor too far forward. Generally, the chin should be parallel to the floor.

Equipment for Practicing

Essentially, there are a few pieces of equipment that are of incalculable assistance to a singer—particularly, two mirrors and a recording device (tape recorder, laptop computer, CD recorder, or digital recorder). The mirrors should be of two kinds: one, full length, from which the student can gauge overall posture and appearance; the second, a small hand mirror, with which throat position can be evaluated. The record-

ing device should be used to make an auditory check on performance progress. Later on, a camcorder can be used to visually monitor overall presentation.

Listening to yourself can be uncomfortable, but there is perhaps no quicker method of correcting a mistake than to hear it when it is played back from an external source. The recording limitations of electronic equipment often cause the voice to sound less sonorous than it actually is, but it is nevertheless a valuable aid to practicing. If students do not have a piano available for use, or do not know how to play one, they can, and should, record vocal exercises and songs given to them by their teacher.

Concluding Comments

Again, practicing, to progress as quickly as possible, demands absolute concentration and attention to the smallest details. If there is a more efficient or beautiful way to sing a note, stop and try it again. Those with the most to gain from paying attention to details are the singers themselves. If concentration falters, relax for a few minutes, then resume your practicing. A beginning voice student is generally able to practice for thirty minutes, maintaining concentration and exercising the voice, without tiring.

Chapter 2
Vocalizing

Every practice session should begin with a period of vocalizing, exercising, or "warming up" the voice. If a student is planning to practice for thirty minutes, for example, half of that time might well be allocated to **vocalises** (vocal exercises) and half to the study of songs. The reasons for vocalizing can be more readily understood when the student realizes that the vocal cords are actually **muscles** that extend from the front to the back of the throat and that, in fact, one is learning to coordinate them and the other muscles in the **larynx** (voice box) with the airstream.

The goal is to learn to adjust pitch, volume, and tone quality and to control the interaction among them. Vocalises will increase blood circulation, flexibility, and responsiveness, characteristics that can then be transferred to the songs.

Voice students need to understand how the body participates in the singing process. Because this understanding aids in analyzing reasons for desirable and undesirable voice production, some simplified drawings (Figures 2.1–2.4), augmented by discussion, are included here.

The Larynx

Vertically, the adult larynx measures about one and a half inches (40 mm). The average measurement of its circumference is five inches (125 mm). At puberty, the male larynx sometimes enlarges more dramatically than does the female, accounting for the difficulty in coordinating the action of the laryngeal muscles often experienced by teenage boys.

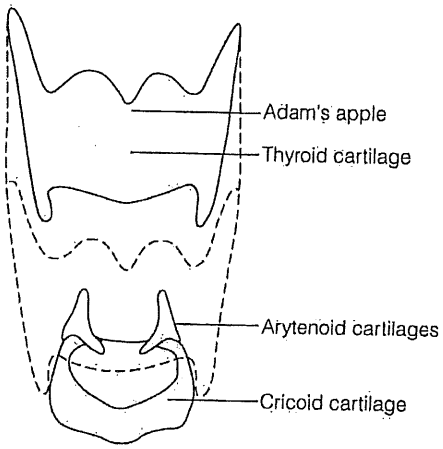


Figure 2.1
Front view of the separated cartilages of the larynx

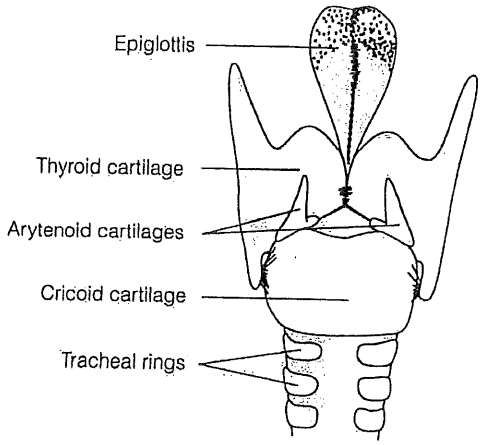


Figure 2.2
Back view of the larynx

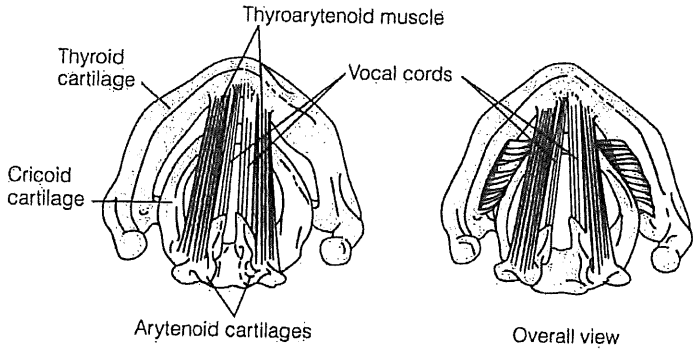


Figure 2.3
Top view of the muscles inside the larynx

Cartilages of the larynx

The larynx is composed of two major **cartilages**—cartilage being that bodily substance that can develop into bone—namely, the cricoid and the thyroid (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2). The **cricoid** is actually a specialized cartilaginous ring at the upper end of the windpipe. It is shaped like a signet ring, with the signet in the back of the throat and the shaft of the ring in the front of the throat. The **thyroid**, which we frequently identify as the Adam's apple, is V-shaped, with the angle of the V in the front of the throat, and the open portion in the back.

Vocal cords

The **vocal cords**, also called **vocal folds**, attach to the thyroid cartilage in the front, stretch backward across the path of the airstream, and attach to the two small **arytenoids**, pyramid-shaped cartilages, in the back. These small cartilages sit upon the upper edge of the cricoid and glide along its surface. Because of the action of the laryngeal muscles, these cartilages approach each other and the vocal cords are brought together hundreds of times per second.

Laryngeal muscles

There are, in all, five groups of muscles in the larynx (Figure 2.3), including the vocal cords, or **thyroarytenoids** (named for the cartilages

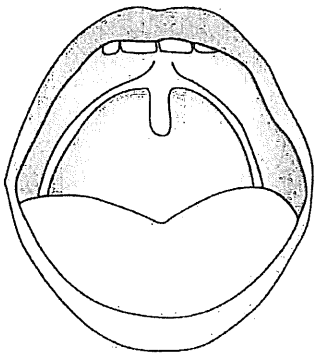


Figure 2.4
Front view of open throat position

to which they attach), and ten cartilages. Only the leaf-shaped **epiglottis**, readily seen in the drawings, might well be mentioned at this stage of study. It is of particular interest because of its size and shape and because of its function. It lies back across the top of the larynx frequently during swallowing, diverting food particles across the windpipe, into the esophagus.

Vocalises

Now to the practical points of vocalization. In the following paragraphs, a set of progressive vocalises will be given. The possibility exists for devising literally hundreds of vocal exercises, most of which might be used advantageously. It is important to realize precisely for what reason a vocalise is used. For the beginning student, a fairly set and limited number of exercises might be the preferable regimen.

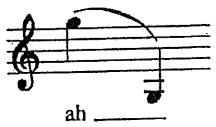
Again, they should be worked on for at least fifteen minutes before proceeding to the practice of songs.

The "open" throat

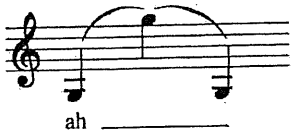
A well-produced sung tone is based on what is often termed an "open" throat (Figure 2.4). The process for learning this technique can be accelerated by using the *oh* vowel for a period of time instead of the *ah* vowel. The *oh* vowel more quickly enables the singer to get used to an elevated **soft palate** (the muscular portion of the roof of the mouth, directly behind the **hard palate**) and the lowered tongue, the two primary indicators of an open throat. It is also true that most new voice students do not stretch open the throat to the extent that they imagine, and the *oh* will counteract this tendency.

Exercises 2.1 and 2.2

Silently yawn the throat open, and at the beginning stage of the yawn, quietly slide from your highest comfortable pitch to your lowest comfortable pitch on the vowel *oh* or *ah*. Using a hand mirror and penlight to facilitate viewing, in this and all succeeding exercises, be certain the tongue and palate remain absolutely still. Repeat.



Proceeding in a similar manner, begin a yawn, quietly slide from your lowest comfortable pitch to your highest comfortable pitch, then back down to your lowest comfortable pitch.

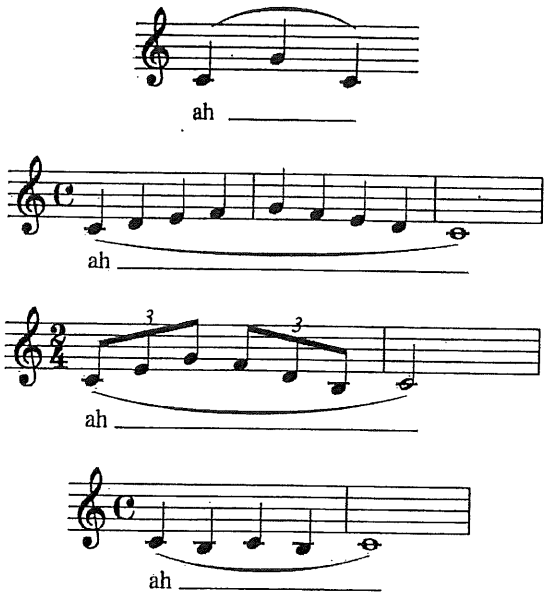


Goal: To maintain a constantly high palate and lowered tongue and an even, unbroken tone.

Avoid: The arching tongue, lowering palate, and breaks in the tone. If breaks should occur, add a little nasality to the vowel by temporarily using the syllable "honk." Be careful not to use the full part of the yawn, or the throat will be too widely opened, resulting in a depressed tongue and "gagging" sensation.

Exercises 2.3–2.6

Using the same method required in the first vocalises, and proceeding in this and all vocalises upward by half steps, slide between pitches of a perfect fifth on the *oh* or *ah* vowel. All exercises should be developed to as high a pitch as is comfortable; then descend by half steps back to the original starting pitch. This arrangement is used because the vocal cords are more relaxed on low pitches than they are on high ones.

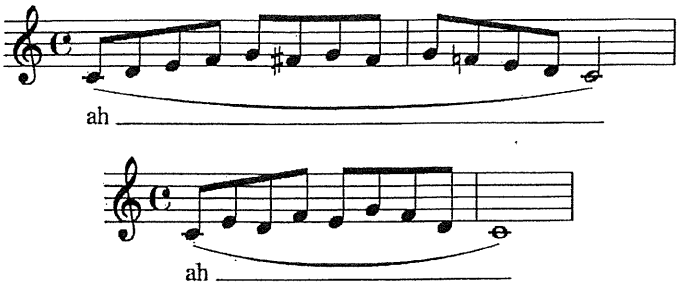


Goal: Same as Exercises 2.1 and 2.2.

Avoid: Same as Exercises 2.1 and 2.2.

Exercises 2.7 and 2.8

Retaining the open throat on the *oh* or *ah* vowel, and sliding between pitches, sing the following pitches:

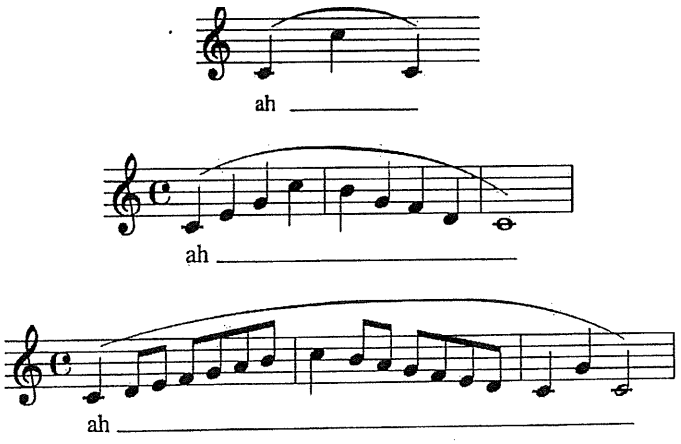


Goal: Same as Exercises 2.1 to 2.6. Also listen for a consistent, unchanging vowel throughout the range of the vocalise.

Avoid: The same undesirable characteristics mentioned for Exercises 2.1 to 2.6. Be careful to eliminate *h*'s between notes, by paying more attention to sliding.

Exercises 2.9–2.11

Using the same directions given for Exercise 2.3, slide through octaves. Introducing a very slight nasal quality by thinking the syllable *on*, as in "honk," into the vowel in the extreme high and low pitches will facilitate the singing of this vocalise.



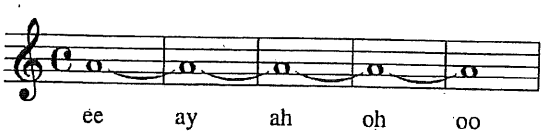
Goal: To maintain a constant vowel, uninterrupted tone, and consistent volume level throughout the range of each exercise. These exercises are also helpful in developing a wider singing range.

Avoid: The changing vowel, *h*'s, and lowering volume between pitches.

Exercise 2.12

To clarify more fully the tongue positions required for the different vowels, sing the following vowel series on a single pitch. The vowels should be sung with low jaw and high palate and should seem to "melt" into one

another. The tip of the tongue should be in approximately the same place for the *ee* and *ay* vowels. For most students, "head tone," a vibration in the head, should be felt in the same place as the vowels progress.

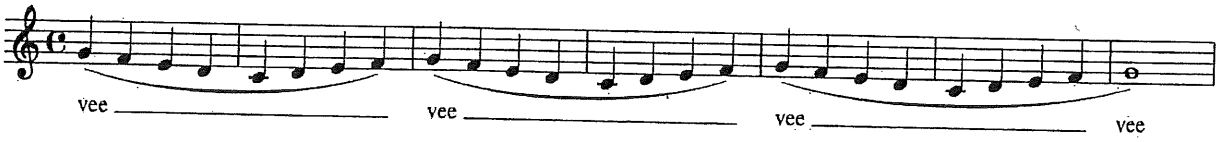


Goal: Same as Exercise 2.6.

Avoid: Same as Exercise 2.6.

Exercise 2.13

To assist in accelerating the airflow, sing the following exercise, teeth apart, lower lip lightly touching upper teeth for the initial *vee* sound. Imagine the pitches as sweeping upward instead of lowering, so that the airflow will continue to move energetically.



Goal: To transcend the "breathy" phase of voice production until a brilliant "core" is consistently sung into the tone. It will often result in head tone and ringing in the ears.

Avoid: Singing with clenched teeth and a fluctuating amount of brilliance.

Chapter 3
Breathing

As soon as the principle of the open throat has been clearly understood and somewhat integrated into the vocalises, the basics of good breath support, perhaps the most important single element in the production of beautiful tone, should be reviewed. The open throat was discussed first because, when blown against a tight throat, an energetic airstream, regardless of its amount of control, can create discomfort and hoarseness.

The Physiology of Breathing

Trachea and bronchi

Beginning with the physiological process of breathing (see Figure 3.1), the windpipe, or **trachea**, is made up of a series of cartilaginous rings somewhat resembling a vacuum hose. It is about four and a half inches (114 mm) long, with an average diameter of three-quarters of an inch (19 mm). Connecting the rings are muscle and **membrane**. The same membranous tissue also covers the larynx, throat, mouth, and nose—important information when considering the effects of upper-respiratory infections. The trachea eventually subdivides into two **bronchi**, one **bronchus** for each lung. The bronchi further subdivide into numerous **bronchioles**, through which oxygen passes into the lungs.

The lungs

The **lungs** are made of spongy membranous tissue, which is formed into two sacs, one located in the right side of the chest, the other in the

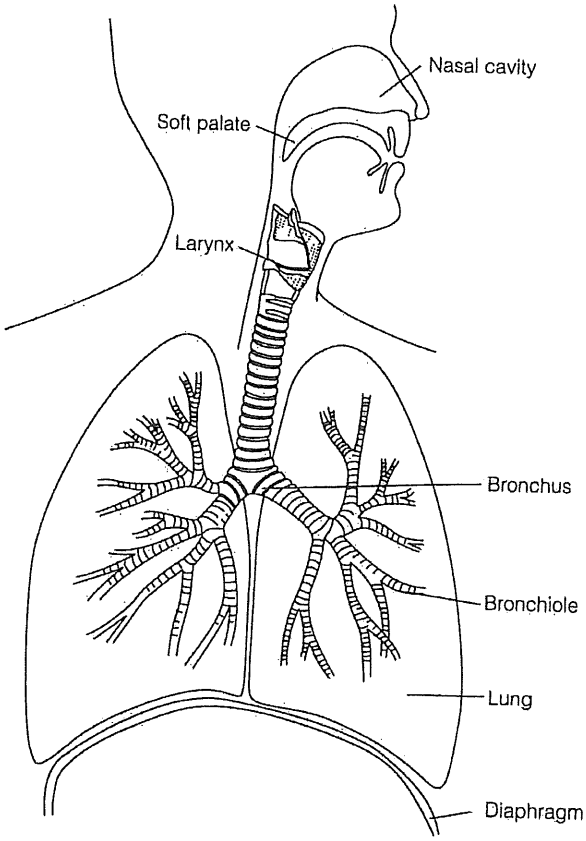


Figure 3.1
Respiratory system

left. Oxygen passes through these membranes into the blood. The lungs also dispose of certain waste products, such as carbon dioxide. They can expand their capacity only as far as the ribs will allow, which is one reason why it is important for singers to keep the position of the ribs raised and out. In a cycle of deep inhalation and exhalation, such as that used in singing, three and a half quarts (3.3 liters) of air may be exhaled, leaving one and a half quarts (1.4 liters) of residual air in the lungs. Because new singing students often mistakenly operate on the premise of "saving air" while they sing, it is important to be aware of the large quantity of air that can and should be used.

Intercostal muscles

Assisting in the raising and lowering of the ribs are the **intercostal muscles** (see Figure 3.2). The backward and downward position of the shoulders also enables the ribs to be positioned most optimally for maximum lung expansion. The ribs should be maintained in this expanded condition during exhalation as well as inhalation, in order to prevent their weight from prematurely pushing air out of the lungs.

The diaphragm

Below the lungs lies the **diaphragm.** It is a massive, dome-shaped muscle that divides the chest cavity from the abdominal cavity (see Figure 3.1). It attaches to the lower ribs and vertebrae, with its dome

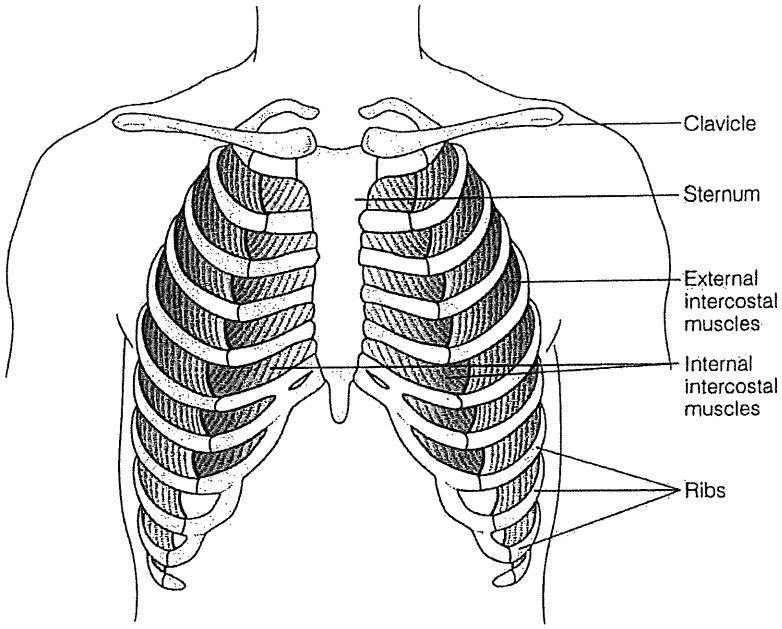


Figure 3.2
Internal and external intercostal muscles

pointing up toward the chest cavity. It is the most important muscle of inhalation. As one inhales, the diaphragm flattens, allowing the lungs to inflate. One consequence of this action is that—and singers should take careful note of it—during inhalation, the abdominal muscles will move outward as the abdominal contents are compressed by the lowering of the diaphragm. Conversely, at exhalation, which occurs while a tone is being produced, the general direction of the abdominal muscles will usually be movement inward (see Figure 3.3). Most new voice students move their abdominal muscles in exactly the opposite direction from that which is ideal.

Abdominal muscles

As the muscles of the chest are most active at inhalation, so the muscles of the abdomen are most active at exhalation. There are four groups of abdominal muscles, all of which are called into action during singing. As can be seen in Figure 3.4, the area covered by the abdominals extends from the **sternum** (breastbone) and ribs to the pubic bone and around to the back. It is important that they be relaxed during inhalation throughout their total expanse, to allow maximum intake of air.

Breathing While Singing

For an even release of air, the singer may influence diaphragmatic movement by flexible and smooth contraction of the abdominals during exhalation. Although it is typical of "well-supported" singing to feel muscular

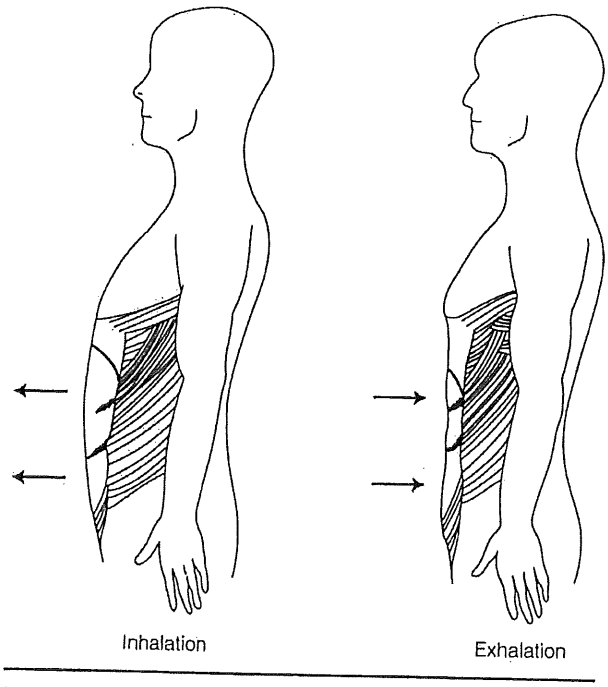


Figure 3.3
Muscle action during breathing

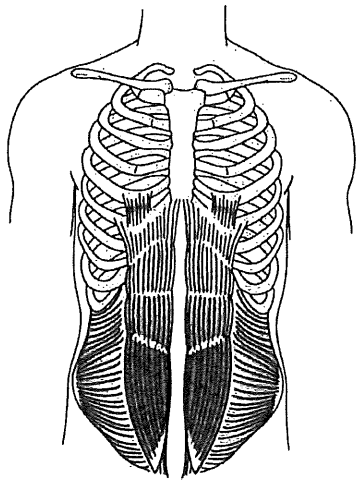


Figure 3.4
Muscles of the abdomen

exertion in the back, a new student might pull in the abdominal muscles too rapidly, resulting in discomfort. To avoid this occurrence and to keep the pressure of the rising abdomen off the diaphragm for as long as possible, the singer should be certain that inward abdominal movement is paced with the musical phrase. It should be slow and gradual unless an increased amount of air is needed to produce a higher or louder **pitch**. When this situation occurs, the rising diaphragm will push air out of the lungs with more force if the abdominals are pulled in more quickly.

Review Chapter 2's vocalises

Now that the mechanics of breathing have been discussed, the voice-building process will be helped by reviewing the vocalises listed in Chapter 2 with an expanded view of their purpose. In addition to the concentration on the open throat, careful breathing habits should be observed. That is, the abdominals should be expanded at inhalation and move gradually inward during singing. Once exhalation is begun, the inward movement should be continuous, including the "spaces" between the notes. Stopping the pulling action after each pitch results in a "punchy-sounding" vocal line, instead of a smooth one.

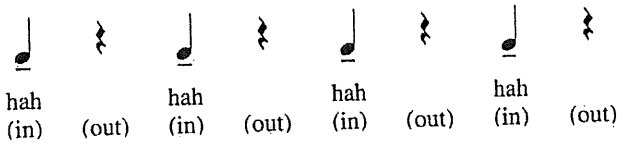
The ribs should be kept in an upward and outward position during inhalation and exhalation. The shoulders should be kept back and down, never moving, during inhalation and exhalation. Finally, a check can be made on this process, by placing the palms of the hands on the abdomen, fingers spread, to monitor the movement of the abdominals throughout their length. When breathing is efficient, the result will be a flexible, uninterrupted tone. After having reviewed the vocalises in

Chapter 2 (Exercises 2.1–2.7) with a new emphasis on breathing, concentrate on the following (Exercises 3.1–3.5).

Vocalises

Exercise 3.1

At the rate of one exhalation per second, and using the *hoh* or *hah* syllable, speak the sounds while rapidly pulling in the abdominal muscles. It is important to allow the abdominals to relax (move outward) after each syllable.

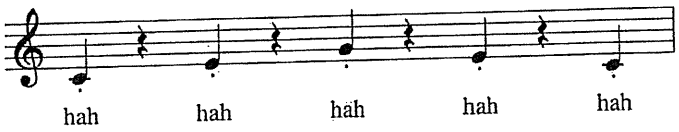


Goal: To develop a strong, even contraction of the abdominal muscles over their entire area.

Avoid: Singing with a high jaw and neglecting to allow the abdominals to relax between syllables (the consequence of which is muscular spasm).

Exercise 3.2

Using the "open throat" and keeping the lower jaw down and back, sing the arpeggio given, on *staccato*, or short, notes.



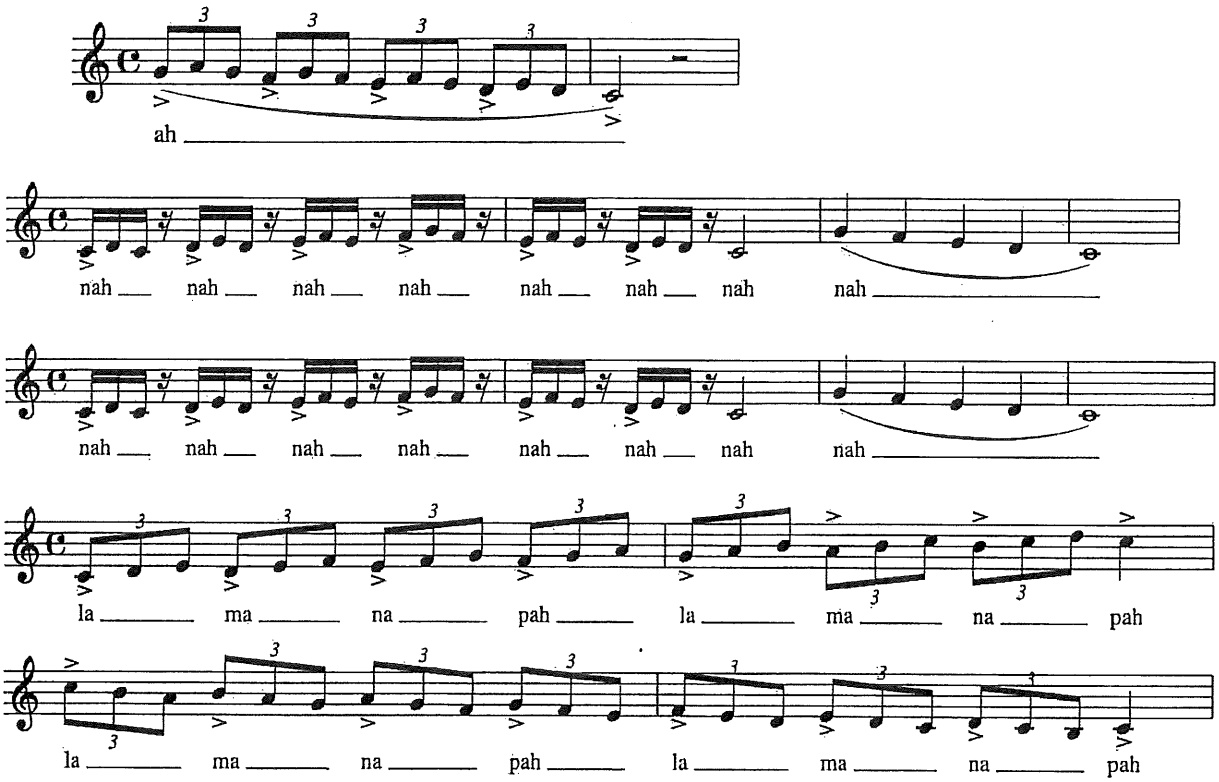
Goal: To add facility to the pattern of abdominal movement established in the vocalise in Exercise 3.1.

Avoid: Same difficulties discussed in Exercise 3.1.

Exercises 3.3–3.6

For greater flexibility, sing the following pattern using the *oh* or *ah* vowel with an unbroken (legato) line of absolutely consistent quality. Use the concept of sliding pitch to pitch. Add very slight nasality on the upper and lower tones for greater ease of performance and to give more fullness

to sound. The first pitch in each group of three (marked with the horizontal "v" [>]) should be slightly accented, by rapidly contracting, then relaxing, the abdominal muscles. For exercises with consonants, the teeth should always be kept apart, with only the tongue and lips adjusted to create the sounds.

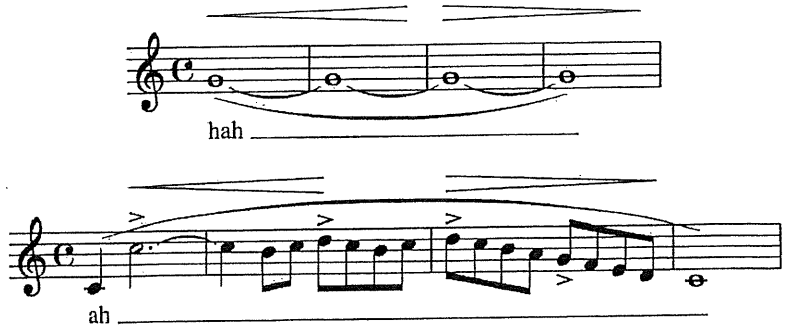


Goal: To coordinate the activity of the abdominal muscles with the airflow, resulting in a flexible, smooth line.

Avoid: Fluctuating volume level and interrupted flow of tone.

Exercises 3.7 and 3.8

To develop volume, sustain these exercises for sixteen beats, at a moderate tempo, using the *oh* or *ah* vowel. Gradually increase the volume to the loudest comfortable level, then gradually decrease to the original level, always pulling inward on the abdominals. Blow out air more rapidly as volume builds.

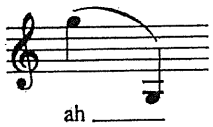


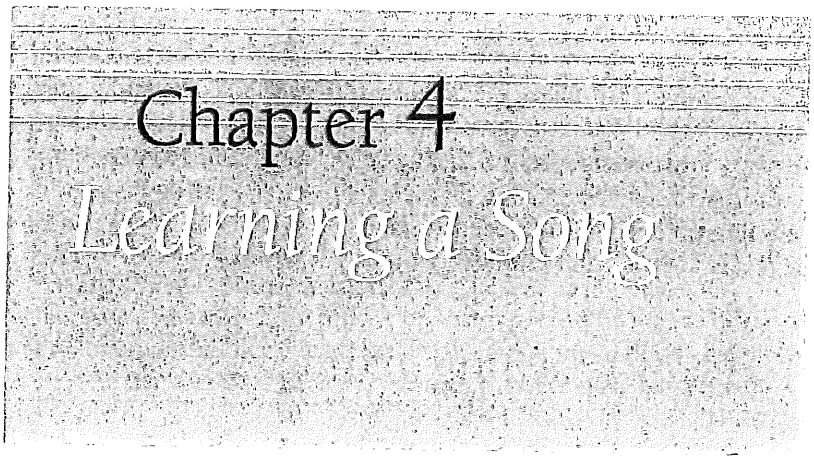
Goal: To fluctuate volume levels, using an unbroken line and an evenly distributed progression of sound.

Avoid: Sacrificing tone as the volume level is altered because of a changing vowel or an erratic vibrato.

Exercise 3.9

Repeat Exercise 2.1 to relax cords.





To transfer good technique from vocalises to songs is a primary goal of singers at all stages of development. Just as practicing should always and without exception begin with concentration on technique in the vocalises, so, then, should careful thought be given to ways of transferring that same technique to songs, whether those songs are classical, theater, or pop. Although there are different types of techniques for various songs, exercises covered in the first year or two of voice study are usually so general that even the most dedicated pop singers will not damage their commercial potential by using them.

Transferring Technique to Songs

The emphasis in transferring technique to songs is not directed, necessarily, toward allowing the singer to sound "natural." The emphasis is rather on vocal health, beauty of tone, and effective musical interpretation. Singing "naturally" is almost never good enough. Performers whose technique gives that illusion have generally spent thousands of solitary hours thinking and practicing to improve their performance.

The frequent impression of new voice students is that the incorporation of technique into their songs gives them too much of an operatic sound. Another impression often mentioned is that a song is too high. Because we usually speak with the mouth nearly closed, it seems strange to open it for a more sonorous tone during singing. This fuller sound, which is often thought of by the new student as "too classical," is actually

the first step toward beautiful singing and can be heard in good performers working in all styles.

It is also a source of surprise to many to hear themselves producing greater volume and singing on a higher pitch or with a different quality than that to which they have been accustomed all their lives. Learning to sing songs that at first seem too high develops greater breath control and strengthens the vocal muscles. It extends the singer's options when selecting material to perform, enlarges the possibilities for styling, and generally improves the entire range of the voice.

Tools of Learning a Song

As with practicing vocalises, a recording device is an indispensable aid to learning a song. The singer may have the melody line first recorded without, then with, the piano accompaniment, in order to expedite the learning process. The compact discs available with this book offer accompaniments with prominently featured melody lines for songs included in the anthology. As the learning of the song progresses, the singing should periodically be recorded, played back, and carefully analyzed. The teacher's guidance in assessing the technique used in the song and its interpretation is vital, since it is extremely difficult for singers to evaluate themselves. But it is the students who will ultimately decide the extent of their own success. As with vocalizing, the successful singer will be the one who follows directions given, in the most minute detail, and who practices consistently with enormous concentration.

Steps in Learning a Song

The order of the steps for learning a song varies according to the learning patterns of a singer. The following approach is only one workable method. To help illustrate the steps, an art song from the anthology, "Beneath a Weeping Willow's Shade," will be used. The assumption is made that any song studied has been approved for the student's use by the teacher.

Play melody

To begin, record the melody first without the accompaniment, then with the complete piano part. Play the recording of the unaccompanied melody once, then repeat if desired, silently following along with the music.

Play melody with accompaniment and determine style

Next, play the melody with accompaniment. Notice the general feeling of the music, whether, for example, it is heavy or descriptive (with an accent every two beats, like a march, or every three beats like a waltz). Check the dates of the composer to find out if the song is fairly recent or from some other period. By considering the text and music, determine the overall style of the song. Was it intended to be a folk song, a song for worship, for the theater, or for some other use?

"Beneath a Weeping Willow's Shade" (see Exercise 4.1) was written during the lifetime of George Washington; therefore, the picture of men and women in the dress of that time dancing to the music of the harp-

sichord might readily be imagined. The feeling is light, but accented on every third beat.

Sing along using la; *mark difficult spots*

Return in the music to the unaccompanied melody and, using the syllable *la,* sing along, being careful that the sung pitches and rhythms are exactly the same as those heard on the piano. This step should be repeated as many times as necessary to accomplish this goal. One time-saving device is to isolate those places in the melody that are repeatedly sung incorrectly or are in any way difficult. Above them, mark an X with pencil, which can later be erased as they are mastered. In "Beneath a Weeping Willow's Shade," measures 8, 9, and 35 might be confusing because of the dotted rhythms (notes with dots following are held half again as long as they would be normally, resulting in the shortening of the note that follows). Measures 25 and 26 might prove surprising because of the introduction of wider intervals between the notes of the melody. (Until that point, most of the notes have been adjacent to one another in the scale, or very nearly so.)

Whisper in rhythm while playing melody

When the pitches and rhythms are learned, whisper the words of the text in rhythm while playing back the unaccompanied melody. This could be done two or three times, or until there are no difficulties performing this step. In all songs, a word is found directly underneath the note to which it corresponds. Frequently, two or more notes are sung on the same syllable. In measure 8, "wil" is sung on two notes, and in measure 32, "way" is sung on seven notes.

Meaning and mood

After the music and text have been put together, some time should be taken to analyze and picture the meaning and mood of the text. Read the text aloud. What exactly is the text trying to communicate? Then, with pencil, mark a comma in each place where a breath seems sensible, taking into consideration the sound of the melody and the meaning of the words. Breaths are taken to separate thoughts. For example, in measure 12, a breath separates "Her hand upon her heart she laid" from "And plaintive was her moan." And in measure 4, second verse, a breath separates "Fond Echo to her strains replied" from "The winds her sorrow bore." Sections of repeated text, such as those found in measure 28, are also usually separated with a breath.

Another necessity, in order to effectively give expression to a text, is to research the meaning of any words that are not understood. In "Beneath a Weeping Willow's Shade," measure 3, second verse, Echo (the nymph from Greek mythology who faded away for love of Narcissus, retaining only her voice) is mentioned. And in measure 27, the word *dulcet* (meaning "melodious") is used. In foreign-language songs, every word must be clearly understood by the singer, a process that is simplified as more and more foreign-language songs are learned. Knowing the "general meaning" is never enough.

Breathing and articulation

After the music and text are memorized, attention should be turned once again to technique and its transference to the song. The correctness of the breathing should be checked. Are the abdominals moving out at inhalation? Are the ribs maintained in an upward and outward position? Are the shoulders still and in the proper position?

And what about good articulation?

Strange as it feels, the essence of good **articulation** is to sing with the upper and lower teeth apart, using a flexible tongue and lips to form the

words. This combination coupled with a constantly elevated soft palate allows for more vertical space inside the mouth, which prevents the sound from being unduly dampened by its soft structures.

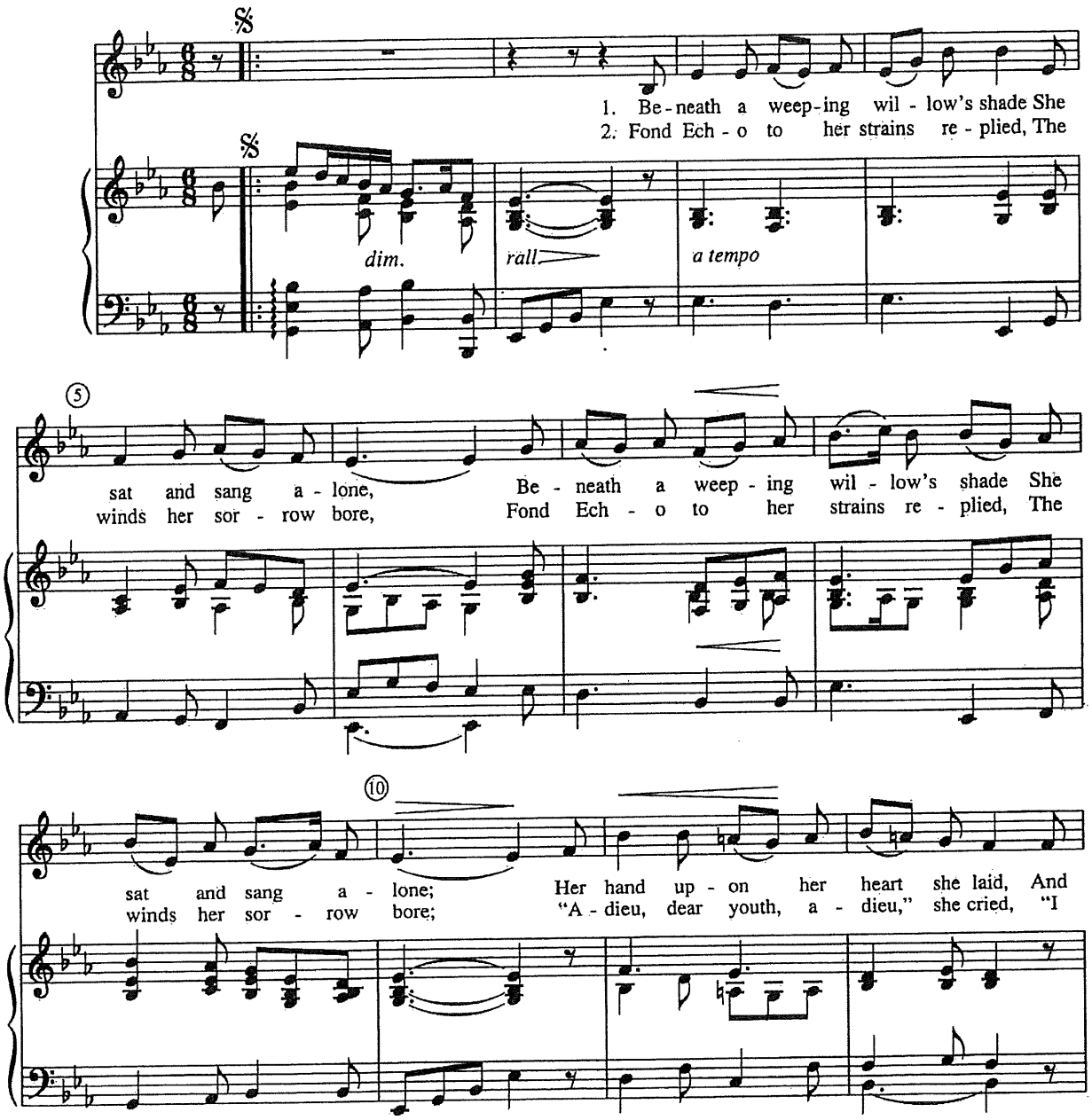
Exercise 4.1

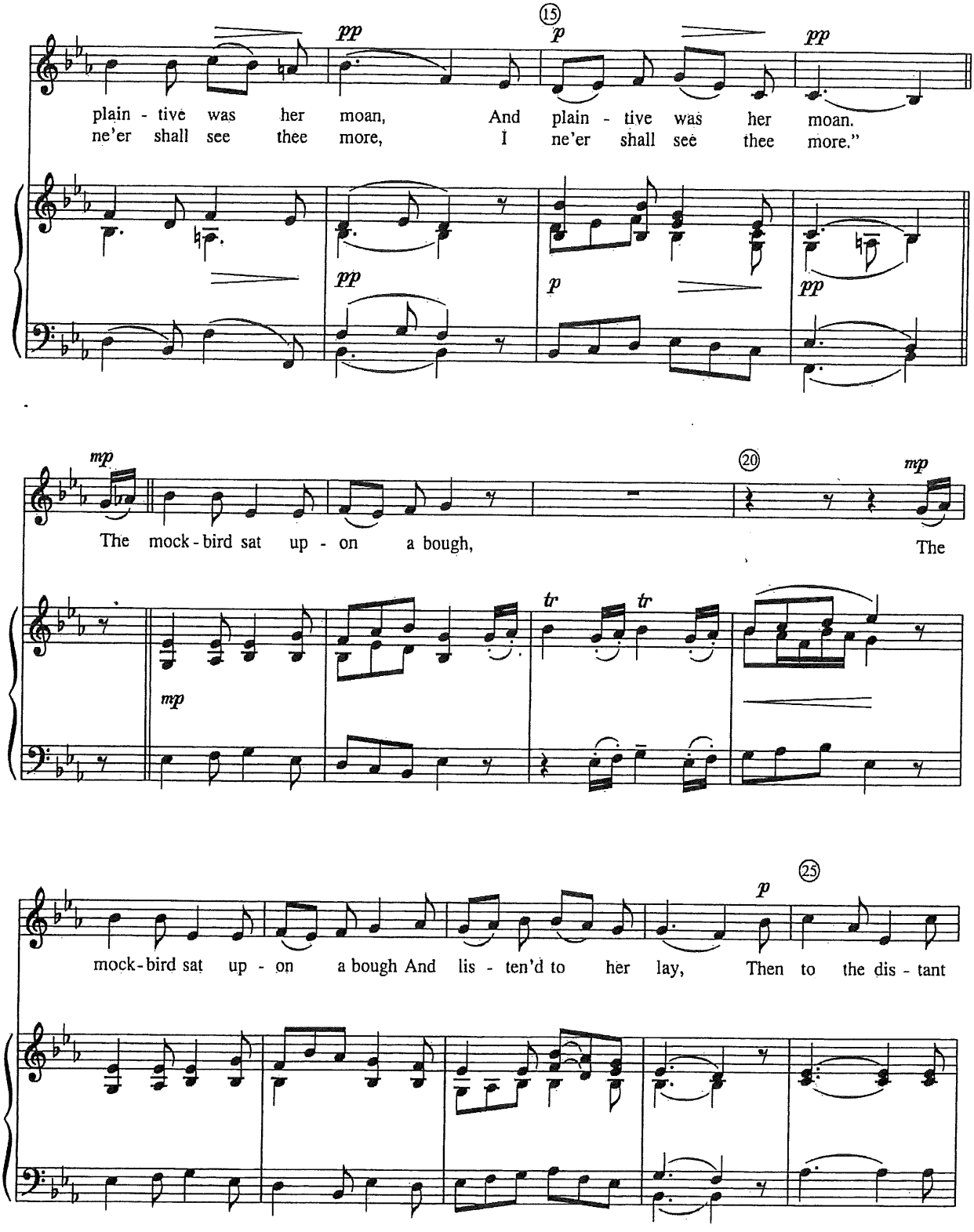
Beneath a Weeping Willow's Shade

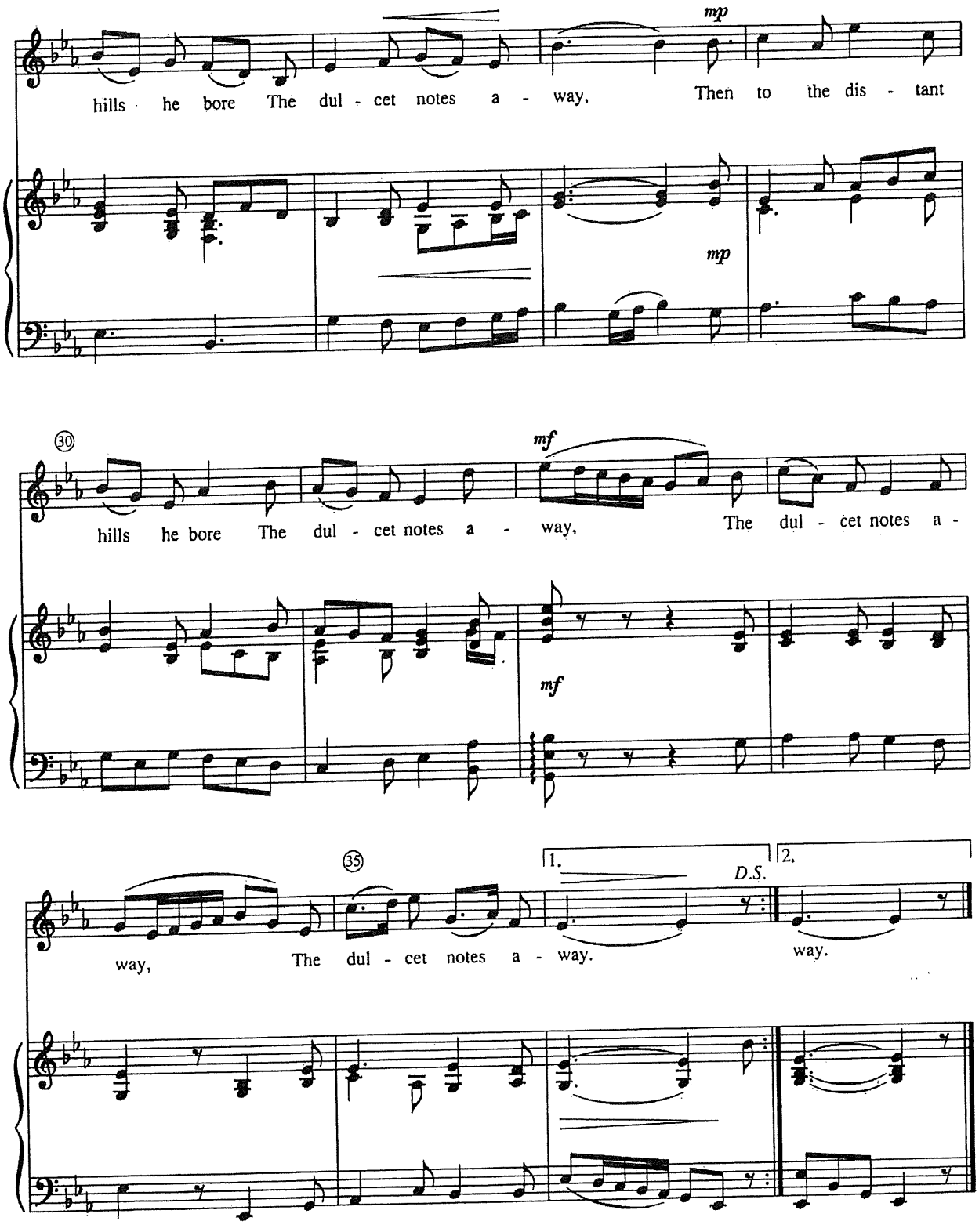
Piano acc. adapted from the original by Roy S. Stoughton

Words and Music by Francis Hopkinson (1737–1791)

Dedicated to George Washington, Esquire




pp
15
p
pp
plain - tive was her moan, And plain - tive was her moan.
ne'er shall see thee more, I ne'er shall see thee more."
pp
p
pp
mp
20
mp
The mock - bird sat up - on a bough, The
mp
tr
tr
25
p
mock - bird sat up - on a bough And lis - ten'd to her lay, Then to the dis - tant


mp
hills he bore The dul - cet notes a - way, Then to the dis - tant
mp
30
mf
hills he bore The dul - cet notes a - way, The dul - cet notes a -
mf
35
1.
2.
D.S.
way, The dul - cet notes a - way. way.

Depending on the type of tone quality a teacher might prefer, one abbreviated pronunciation guide for new students might be the following:

Vernacular	International Phonetic Alphabet	Guide
ee	[i]	Pronounced as the vowel sound in "feet," using low jaw, high palate, tongue and lips forward.
ay	[e]	A diphthong that begins like the vowel sound in "pet" and, at its release, concludes in the position for an *i*, as in "it," with no movement of the lowered jaw between sounds.
ah	[a]	The vowel in "palm," with the same low jaw position used for *ee* and *ay*.
oh	[o]	The position of the palate for this sound is high. Heard in "tone," this sound uses a jaw position that is somewhat lower than for the preceding vowels with the palate raised.
oo	[u]	The vowel sound heard in "moon," pronounced with lips forward and the jaw in the low position used for *oh*. The palate will be as highly arched as possible.

Vowels should be modified from the foregoing guide in words that require it, so that pronunciation of texts is perceived as natural. For example, the vowel in the first syllable of "willow" will be pronounced in a way that more closely resembles its spoken pronunciation than it does "*wee*llow."

In good articulation, a tone quality should be continuous throughout the phrase. This means that the character of the tone should not fluctuate between shrill and hooty as syllables change.

Consonants, because they dissipate more rapidly than vowels, must be emphasized more heavily in singing than in speech. Otherwise, the meaning of a text will be totally lost even in a small auditorium.

Communicating a Song

When a song has been thoroughly worked through, first musically, then technically, it is time to consider how to communicate it. Videotape or digital recording is a great help when working to improve this area. Practicing before a full-length mirror is a useful alternative. The singer needs, quite literally, to picture the things being sung about in the text. Concentration, which must also be practiced, is the key.

Being, *not* acting

If a performer identifies strongly enough with the text of a song, actually picturing himself in a place, a situation, or as a certain person, that is all he will be able to think about. The term *acting* is often misinterpreted. *Being*, not *acting*, is what touches audiences. Simultaneously, the

music must be sung effectively, shaped by the demands of the composer and the emotions of the singer. And, of course, the audience must be drawn in—convinced—that the singer is exactly who he presumes to be and feels exactly what he proclaims to feel. It is a large task, but, when everything is synchronous, the highest of highs.

Songs must be delivered with great energy to an audience. New singers often feel they are almost yelling when they are singing at a volume level acceptable to a teacher. To effectively convince an audience takes double or triple the amount of energy one would imagine. If a student occasionally overdoes it, the teacher will be the first to say so. Even through piano introductions and interludes, the singer's thoughts must center on the mood and content of the song. If one lapses, even momentarily, dramatic **intensity** will be lost. In the beginning stages, when the transference of technique is often awkward, it is frequently difficult to maintain energy and concentration. But in time, this will come, enabling a singer actually to "sell" a song.

Sample Song-Learning Method

- Record melody, first with, then without, accompaniment. Develop familiarity with both versions.
- Define the historical period, mood, and type of song.
- Sing along with unaccompanied melody using the syllable *la*, marking difficult places with an x. Practice until rhythm and pitches are absolutely accurate.
- Whisper the words of the text in rhythm while listening to the unaccompanied melody.
- Sing text and pitches with unaccompanied melody until learned securely. Sing with accompanied melody.
- Read the text aloud and analyze its meaning.
- Mark appropriate breaths with commas. Circle expression markings.
- Concentrate on the use of good vocal technique in the song.
- Using a recording device, review articulation.
- Practice "selling" the song by picturing its text and performing it with great and consistent energy.

Adjusting to different styles

When applying this method to a song in a style different from that of an art song—for example, "Simple" from musical theater—exactly the same procedure can be used. The biggest difference will be in the mood and styling of the song. The mood of "Beneath a Weeping Willow's Shade," composed in the eighteenth century, is mournful, and intended for private, rather than highly commercial, entertainment. Vocally, an eighteenth-century art song is performed in a very prescribed manner, with continuous vibrato and carefully defined dynamics, which must be meticulously observed.

"Simple," on the other hand, was composed fairly recently, with a reflective text, and is part of a larger musical theater work, *Nine*. In musical theater pieces, the singer has an opportunity for more variety of styling, as long as the interpretation is closely related to the composer's indications in the music. Often, the singing will be more speechlike, meaning that more "straight" tone, using little or no vibrato, is employed. To intelligently perform a musical theater song or operatic aria, the entire story and other music from the show or opera must be studied, in order to understand how the character might sing the song. This can be done by borrowing recordings and scores from the library.

A folk song, such as "Carrickfergus" (see page 86), may be from anywhere and any period. This song is from Ireland; its original date of composition is unknown. It is gently sorrowful and is most attractive when sung with almost continuous vibrato. Because of their casual nature and because frequently they were not originally written out, most folk songs have been reworked countless times. They can be sung with any vocal quality necessary to communicate the spirit of their text, from lyrical to bawdy. The singer should have a consistent enough vocal technique that vocal effects for folk songs, dynamic in presentation and harmless to the voice, can be consciously devised. This same ideal should be the ultimate goal of singers in all types of vocal music performance.

Chapter 5
Basic Principles of Vocal Technique

In order to explain more completely the reasoning behind the singing process, some additional information, particularly that related to articulation and acoustics, will be given in this chapter. While much of the information is based on scientific research, some is based on pedagogical experience, a combination of sources common to all teachers. When a process is well understood, its outcome tends to be more effective and meaningful. Undesirable effects can be analyzed and avoided, while desirable ones can be incorporated and utilized.

Articulation

Ideas about articulation vary greatly from teacher to teacher. At one end of the spectrum are those who ask the students for an extremely pulled-down larynx and a deep yawning quality in the tone. At the other are those who speak often of closing the mouth and lifting the muscles in the upper part of the cheeks for a smiling, bright quality. Because the tone quality a teacher elects to teach is so clearly a matter of personal choice, it is important that students be aware of the options open to them when they are in the process of selecting an instructor.

Taking some elements from both extremes of the spectrum can produce a method of articulation that is vocally comfortable and healthy and readily understandable to listeners.

Open Throat

As the singer begins to transfer technique to songs, it is important to realize that, as one maintains the jaw in a slightly lowered position so that upper and lower teeth can be kept apart, the throat should be kept open, as it was for the vocalises. The stretching open of the throat might feel exaggerated at first, but it should not feel uncomfortable. Both a throat that is too closed and one that is too widely stretched will produce a feeling of tension in the front of the neck just under the lower jaw. It is imperative to sing with a relaxed neck, since constricting its muscles, in front or back, can pull the cartilages of the larynx into positions that will put unnecessary strain on the vocal cords. Singing with a tight neck is one of the major problems with which beginning voice students must be concerned. It distorts articulation, impairs quality, and markedly limits the number of pitches that can be sung. Often, its most obvious manifestation is a sore throat.

Working from the inside out, when the singer begins to concentrate on opening the throat, a phenomenon similar to yawning, it will be noticed that several things happen. Most obviously, the jaw drops, giving a stretching feeling to the chewing muscles. Simultaneously, the soft palate arches and the tongue lowers. These characteristics should always be maintained while singing a song. A tight jaw or tongue that is too high or too far forward will render articulation less distinguishable, by introducing the *uh* vowel into words intended to project an *ah* sound. Since the soft palate also serves as the floor of the nasal cavity, a lowered soft palate will contribute to the production of a tone with nasal quality. (The slight amount of nasality previously suggested for the extreme high and low pitches of the vocalises will not be counterproductive.) Another important function of the raised palate is that, because of its firm surface, it appears to promote clarity, or give **focus**, to the tone. A combination of arched palate and accelerated airflow greatly enhances a tone's carrying power.

Elevated Upper Cheeks

Working from the outside inward, when the singer elevates the muscles in the upper part of the cheeks, the upper lip is raised, thus exposing more of the hard surfaces of the teeth. This will contribute to the production of brilliant tone, but it should not be substituted for energetic airflow and arched palate. Because the upper cheeks are elevated, it does not stand to reason that a broad smile should necessarily result. If the text indicates that such an expression would be appropriate, the singer should follow that suggestion. But often a text will imply a more serious expression, for which the lips should be more relaxed.

Inhalation, Attack, and Line

Inhalation

As singers inhale, they prepare mentally for what they are about to sing. They think of the syllable they will be producing, and thereby assist in the physical, as well as mental, preparation of the body for that syllable.

Attack

The **attack,** or beginning of the tone, should feel comfortable and should be neither too explosive nor too breathy. In an explosive attack, the airstream forces the vocal cords apart, and they slap back together again with more force than is vocally healthy or audibly pleasing. In that instance, a popping sound will precede the syllable. In a breathy attack, when a slight rush of air precedes or accompanies the syllable, the cords do not close firmly enough, and air, which could be more efficiently used, is wasted. Consequently, if a singer makes an explosive attack, it is necessary to relax the neck muscles and slow the rate at which one is contracting the abdominals and blowing air. If the attack is breathy, the airflow needs to be accelerated, by pulling in more rapidly on the abdominals and blowing harder.

Smoking

Smoking is another common cause of breathy production. In the person who smokes, the membranes covering the cords are filled with fluid. Instead of healthy cords opening and closing hundreds of times per second to release clearly defined vibrations, the fluid-filled membranes approximate each other with a closure that is anything but firm. If smoking is stopped, there should be a marked improvement in the clarity of the voice within two weeks.

Vocal line

Following an efficient inhalation and attack, the singer thinks of the totality of the line being sung. To avoid a choppy, word-by-word interpretation of the text, one needs to concentrate on sustaining the vowels of each syllable for as long as it is rhythmically correct to do so. At times it is also helpful to think to the end of the line, keeping part of the concentration on the end of the line of text. These procedures aid greatly in the singing of the **legato,** or smooth, line, one of the prime objectives of advanced singers.

Basics of Correct Articulation

The following are some of the most basic points of correct articulation with which the singer should be familiar:

For the sake of tone quality, the *uh* and *ow* sounds are always altered to an *ah*. This practice is applicable to such words as *love, the,* and *down.* Modification of this basic vowel should be used when needed, especially for diphthongs.

Vowels should be clear and brilliant. *Ee,* as in *see; eh,* as in *when;* and *ay,* as in *say,* are all pronounced as an *ee,* with lowered jaw and using only the slightest modification.

When **diphthongs,** compound vowels, are sung, the first sound is sustained, with the second sound added at the release of the syllable. For example, in the *a* of *shade,* the opening vowel sound *eh* (e) is the sustained sound. The *a* concludes with an *ih* (i) sound, which is added immediately preceding the *d* of *shade* (for example, *sheh-ihd*). Some other common diphthongs are heard in the words *eye, poi,* and the aforementioned *down,* in which the sustained *ah* (a) sound concludes on an *oo* (u).

Consonants are always formed using the tongue and lips, with space between the upper and lower teeth.

When two or more notes are sung on the same syllable, the singer should slide between them. Articulating each of the notes with an *h,* a

very common approach, requires that, for each *h*, the airflow be stopped. This, in turn, interrupts the legato line. (Sliding on a run differs from scooping up to a pitch on an attack, which should be avoided.)

The addition of an extra syllable to the end of a word, such as *frienduh*, is indicative of overemphasis, and should be avoided.

Linking the final consonant of one word to the initial sound of the following word, when it changes the meaning of the text, should be avoided. An often-cited example of this is, "I'm old," which becomes "I mold" if articulated incorrectly.

Good articulation should leave the neck free from tension and be unobtrusive yet render a text clearly understandable.

The measure of effective articulation lies in the quality of its perception. If words cannot be heard, or if a clear understanding of them is difficult for an audience, much of the emotional and intellectual impact of the song is lost. For that reason, some basic information concerning **acoustics**, the study of sound, will be presented.

Acoustics

As the highly flexible vocal cords stretch across the top of the trachea, they open and close in a wavelike motion, from bottom to top. This action divides the exhaled airstream into numerous tiny puffs, or wave fronts, every second. If, for example, they open and close 440 times in a second, the buzz they produce will be perceived as the first A above middle C.

As the wave fronts are emitted, billions of molecules of air are pushed outward in all directions from the source. The moving molecules do not experience a permanent displacement; after the wave passes by, they return to their original position (see Figure 5.1). The outward movement of the molecules is termed **compression**, and the return of the molecules to their original position is called **rarefaction.**

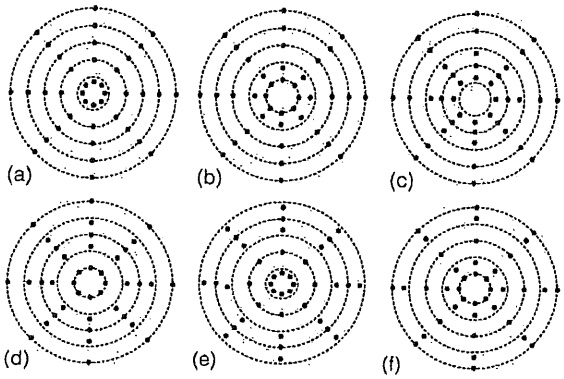


Figure 5.1
Traveling pattern of sound waves through air

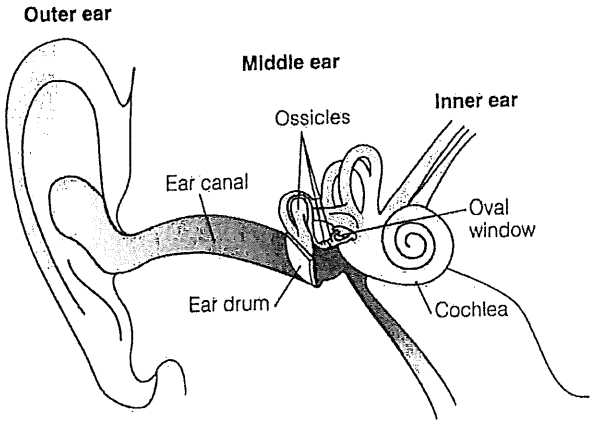


Figure 5.2
The ear

Sound travels at the rate of approximately eleven hundred feet (335 m) per second. It enters the outer ear and travels through the tubular canal, which is approximately one inch (25 mm) long. At the end of the **ear canal** is the sensitive membranous **eardrum**, which vibrates at the same frequency with which it is disturbed by the compressed air molecules (see Figure 5.2).

The motion of the eardrum activates three small bones called **ossicles**, which are suspended in the **middle ear**—a cavity in the skull. Their movement sets up a vibration in the **oval window**, an oval membrane in the wall of the cochlea. The **cochlea**, a spiral bone in the **inner ear**, is filled with fluid. Nerve endings, which transmit vibrating movement to the brain, are also found in the cochlea.

Resonance

Resonance is a response to a produced sound, during which that sound is prolonged and intensified. The three primary **resonators** for the voice are, in order of importance, the throat, the mouth, and the nose. Research has shown that, although a singer might feel sympathetic vibrations in the chest, trachea, larynx, or sinuses, those areas have little or no value as resonators. When the surfaces of the resonators are stretched to form a yawn or open throat, they are hardened, thereby conducting sound more effectively. The resonators also filter out, or dampen, some sounds, a process that is even more evident when their surfaces are flaccid.

It should be noted that the nose is an occasional resonator, while the throat and mouth function constantly as resonators. Nasal resonance is primarily necessary for the production of nasal consonants, such as *m*, *n*, and *ng*. It is also important in the singing of foreign languages, notably French, because of their nasal vowels.

The shape of the primary resonators determines, to a large extent, the quality of tone produced. When the singer wishes to communicate a vowel, it is usually sustained as long as is rhythmically possible, since a vowel can be projected far better than a consonant. This is because the movement in the sound wave of a vowel, categorized as **tone**, is even or repetitive and, by nature, has a longer duration. In contrast, although there are a few exceptions, such as *m* and *n*, most consonants fall into the

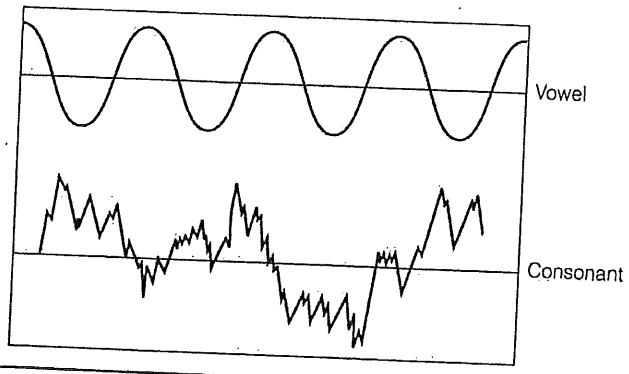


Figure 5.3
Repetitive and nonrepetitive sound waves

acoustic category of **noise**, which is characterized by uneven or nonrepetitive sound waves (see Figure 5.3). The properties of these types of waves cause their vibrations to fall off quickly, creating a need for high-energy pronunciation of these kinds of sounds.

Registration

Another area of acoustics that is of particular interest to singers is registration. **Registers** have been defined as "a series of consecutive similar vocal tones which the musically trained ear can differentiate at specific places from another adjoining series of likewise internally similar tones."*

In terms of pitch, beginning singing students often refer to registers as "low voice," "regular voice," or "high voice." In terms of volume, they are sometimes differentiated by the terms "heavy voice" and "light voice." Regardless of the names applied to registers, most teachers would probably agree that the goal of the student should be to eliminate awareness of their existence. If a singer has **breaks** in the voice and changes in tone quality (vowel color) between high and low pitches, it is simply because that student has not yet learned to coordinate airflow with the actions of the laryngeal musculature and resonators.

Generally, researchers refer to three main registers: **chest, middle,** and **head** in the female voice, and **chest, head,** and **falsetto** in the male voice. In the trained voice, each register is about an octave in length, with several notes that can be sung in either register at those points where the registers overlap (see Figure 5.4).

In nearly all untrained singers, one of the registers, frequently chest, will be used considerably more than the others. It is the task of the student to practice exercising the voice throughout its entire range, so that songs might be interpreted with greater style and beauty.

In those areas where registers overlap, the register is used that makes the most dramatic or musical sense. For example, when a soprano sings "Beneath a Weeping Willow's Shade" (Example 5.1), the word *alone* in measures 5 and 6 could technically be sung in either chest or middle register, but since the text surrounding it is sung in middle register, it is desirable to use the same for this word.

*M. Nadoleczny, *Untersuchungen über den Kunstgesang* (Berlin: Springer, 1923).

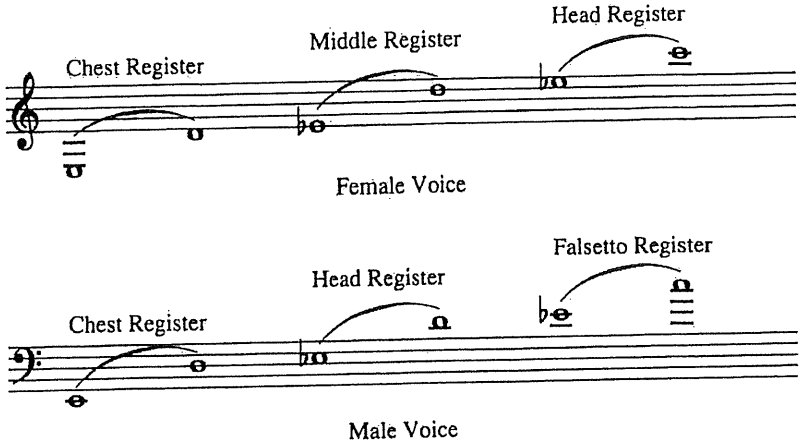
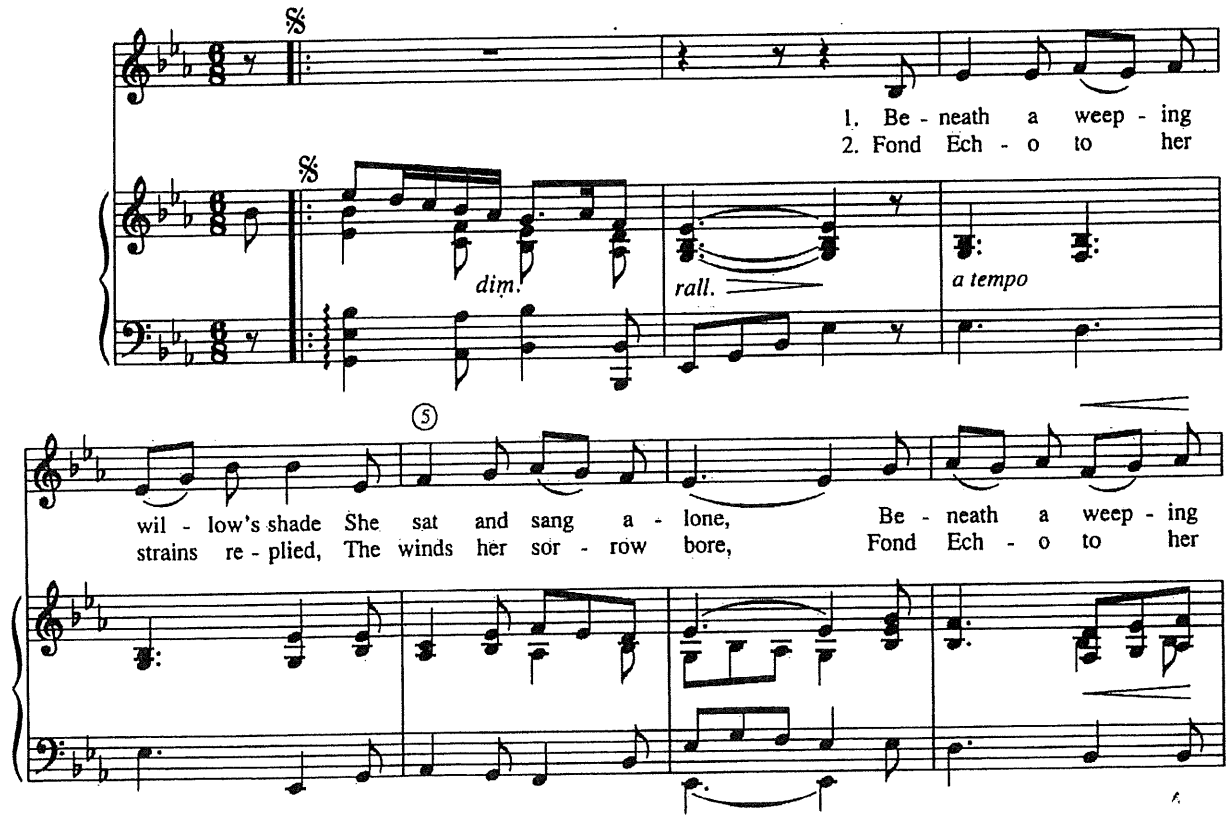


Figure 5.4
Approximate registers of the singing voice

Example 5.1



Chapter 6
Vocal Health

A healthy voice is fundamental to every singer's ability to communicate effectively. Situations adverse to vocal health occur so frequently that they are often overlooked, resulting in unexpected and sometimes irreversible voice damage.

In an extraordinary and easy-to-understand collection of articles on the subject, Drs. Van Lawrence, Robert Sataloff, Ingo Titze et al. have discussed numerous vocal conditions and how to treat them (see Bibliography). It is with reliance on their respected work and wisdom that the information in this chapter is presented as a general guideline for singers. All specific medical questions should be referred to a physician for responsible diagnosis and treatment, and all directions affixed to medication containers should be read and followed exactly. Both common and complex vocal problems can involve the integration of several disciplines of medical and dental science. If a vocal problem seems slow to resolve or requires the efforts of several specialists, it is usually helpful to involve a managing physician versed in evaluating and treating disorders in overlapping areas of anatomy and function.

The importance to each person of understanding how his body works, knowing its parts and identifying its idiosyncrasies, goes without saying. It is also vital to understand the side effects of administered medication, relative not only to voice production, but to overall bodily function as well.

Anti-Inflammatory Medications

Aspirin, perhaps the most common of all medications, is found in many brands of pain medicine and is often ingested by desperate cold sufferers. It is contained in Contac, Coricidon, Bufferin, Excedrin, Empirin, Ascripton, and many other remedies for upper respiratory infections and pain control. Although it is renowned for its positive effect as a pain reliever, it is also well known for its use as a blood thinner. Its frequent consumption can increase the possibility of bleeding into the vocal folds, a particular danger in circumstances during which they are in heavy use or when poor vocal technique is being practiced. Sudden loss of voice and slow, progressive loss of range or vocal quality are symptoms that may indicate vocal fold hemorrhage. Prompt treatment and ongoing follow-up are critical in avoiding permanent changes in voice quality secondary to scar formation.

Potentially, all *anti-inflammatory* medicines inhibit normal blood coagulation and can raise the risk of bleeding into vocal folds and bruising of the skin. Common anti-inflammatory medicines include ibuprofen (the active ingredient in Motrin and Advil), Aleve, Naprosyn, Indocin, and the newest member of this group, Celebrex. Celebrex has an advantage over other anti-inflammatory medicines since it is less likely to cause stomach upset, another common adverse effect of this class of medication.

Anti-inflammatory medications can bring side effects. Too high a dose of this class of medicine can sometimes cause stuffiness and a high-pitched noise or ringing in the ears, known as *tinnitus.* Tinnitus may also be caused by aspirin, ibuprofen, steroids, disorders of the ear, or exposure to repeated or intense noises. If this problem occurs, contact a physician immediately. While some cases are reversible, others have a lingering impact. Steps to avoid tinnitus should be carefully followed, and other side effects of medication, such as circulatory problems or allergies, should be discussed in detail with the prescribing physician.

Cold Cures

The most effective treatments for the common cold are to drink plenty of liquids, stay in as humid an environment as possible (using a humidifier when necessary), and rest. Saline nose drops or spray such as Afrin and Neo-Synephrine can be used for a period of no more than three or four days, and plain Robitussin can be taken to thin mucus, often reducing the amount of hoarseness and coughing.

Decongestants

Decongestants, which shrink the mucosal lining covering the nose and throat, are often wisely recommended for a cold or stuffy nose. One brand, Sudafed, is frequently suggested for treatment of these conditions. While generally effective, a decongestant can be dangerous to patients with high blood pressure because of its adrenaline-like side effects and

can cause sleep deprivation, a major annoyance prior to performance. Tachycardia, or a rapid heart rate, is another frequently reported adverse effect of this class of medication.

Antihistamines

Antihistamines, taken for allergic reactions such as sneezing, itchy eyes, and congested nose, are found in many cold remedies and are readily available. While they are effective as relievers of allergic symptoms, some are sedative and also dry the mucous membranes. Because singing, particularly during performance, requires fast reflexes and dry vocal folds rubbing together can cause serious irritation, it is obvious that sedating antihistamines should be avoided whenever possible. Benadryl and Chlortrimeton are two common brands of this kind of medication. Sleep aids such as Tylenol PM, Nytol, and Sominex also contain antihistamines and manifest these same negative side effects. Combined with alcohol, sedating antihistamines and sleep aids can be extremely dangerous, even fatal.

Fortunately, many prescribed antihistamines are now more successful at alleviating allergic symptoms, and the side effects that might accompany their use are considerably gentler. Medications such as Claritin (loratadine), Allegra (fexofenadine), and Zyrtec (cetirizine) are generally considered nonsedating antihistamines. Their use in treating many allergic disorders is considered "state of the art" and should be used in preference to older sedating antihistamines that cause lethargy and drying of the mucous membranes.

Gastroesophageal Medications

Medicines for stomach acid and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)—such as Axid, Tagamet, Pepcid, Zantac, Prilosec, Prevacid, and Nexium—are commonly taken to ease the symptoms of heartburn. Today there is a greater understanding of the problems caused by the regurgitation, or "reflux," of stomach contents containing acid into the esophagus. Under certain conditions this fluid may reach the larynx or oral cavity. Varying degrees of reflux can cause an acid taste in the throat, chronic cough, hoarseness due to irritation of the vocal folds, or chest pain. These conditions require medical consultation for both diagnosis and management.

Problems caused by reflux disease are often managed by a combination of lifestyle changes and medication. Lifestyle changes include eating smaller meals, raising the head of the bed to help empty the stomach with gravity, and avoiding fatty foods, alcohol, and caffeine-containing beverages. Weight loss often has a significant benefit. Medications also play a large role in treating GERD. Simple antacids such as Tums and Mylanta help neutralize acid in the stomach and esophagus. Other medications known as H2 Blockers (Tagament, Zantac, and Pepcid) and Proton Pump Inhibitors (Prilosec and Prevacid) are effective in suppressing the production of acid in the stomach. These medications are well tolerated but do require medical supervision.

Local Anesthetics

Local anesthetics, found in some throat sprays and lozenges, can be particularly misleading. While offering the sore throat victim immediate comfort, they can lull the singer into a false sense of well-being, which can result in overuse of the voice and consequent vocal damage. Since singing is largely monitored by feel, local anesthetics can present problems of the most serious kind. A sore throat accompanied by redness and fever usually indicates infection and should be evaluated by a physician. Discomfort not accompanied by these symptoms often indicates mouth breathing, an allergy flare-up, or a cold and can be reduced by drinking warm liquids.

Social Drugs

Social drugs, such as marijuana, cocaine, and alcohol, are infamous for the ways in which they disturb bodily function. On stage, as in life, the side effects can be serious. Singing, like sports, demands absolute concentration, with all faculties intact. Despite the frequently reported irresponsible antics of some in-the-news performers, users of social drugs can count on performing far below their potential best. The use of *tranquilizers* such as Valium, Xanax, and Librium also diminishes physical and mental sensations, which are needed to monitor and control vocal performance, and should be taken only when absolutely necessary.

Smoking

Smoking, besides posing a general health risk, is a major irritant to the mouth, throat, and respiratory system. Fluid collects under the mucosa covering the vocal folds, and the mucosal surfaces become inflamed and damaged. Hoarseness and decreased range usually result. Smoking and singing are totally incompatible.

Halitosis

Halitosis, or bad breath, can be a difficult problem for singers. The causes of halitosis can include poor oral hygiene, dental or gum disease, oral lesions that allow the pocketing of food particles, and oral secretions. General measures to combat halitosis include a careful daily hygiene regimen with brushing and flossing and semiannual dental examinations. Obviously, the consumption of odorous foods should be assiduously avoided before a performance.

Other Medications and Toxins

Birth control pills

Birth control pills that are predominantly estrogen appear to have little effect on most users. Pills that are primarily progesterone-based, however, can be another matter. Closely related to testosterone, progestins can have a masculinizing effect on the female larynx. Androgens are even worse in this respect. If this type of medication is used to treat menstrual problems or endometriosis, a laryngologist must be consulted before treatment is begun.

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy, sometimes required to combat malignancy, may involve drugs of the most powerful kind for which there is no viable alternative. It can affect the vocal range of the female singer, but its potential benefit far outweighs the loss of a few high notes.

Blood pressure medication

Blood pressure pills such as Inderal are sometimes prescribed to lessen stage fright. They can suppress the elevation of blood pressure and heart rate necessary to respond to the challenges of performance. As with other drugs that encourage these problems, this type of medication should be avoided when possible in situations where the singer's health will not be negatively affected.

Diuretics

Diuretics, also used in the treatment of high blood pressure and fluid retention, promote the excretion of sodium and fluid. The obvious danger for singers is the possibility of less mucous secretion in the larynx, thereby increasing the probability of underlubricated vocal folds. The result can be the same as that described for other kinds of drying medication: voice fatigue and hoarseness. In addition, diuretics are ineffective in removing the type of swelling that causes "veiled" premenstrual voice.

Inhaled toxins

Pesticides, paint fumes from oil-based paint, and other *inhaled toxins* are other sources of irritation to the voice. A high number of pesticides are thought to dissolve in body fat, never to be eliminated, and should be carefully avoided.

Surgery

Surgical procedures are commonplace and a particular concern for performers. Regardless of the type of surgery, anesthesiologists should always be notified when the patient is a singer and asked to be especially cautious when introducing and removing endotracheal tubes. If a physician identifies *nodules, polyps,* or *cysts* (growths on the vocal folds), this diagnosis should be confirmed by a laryngologist experienced in evaluating and treating singers.

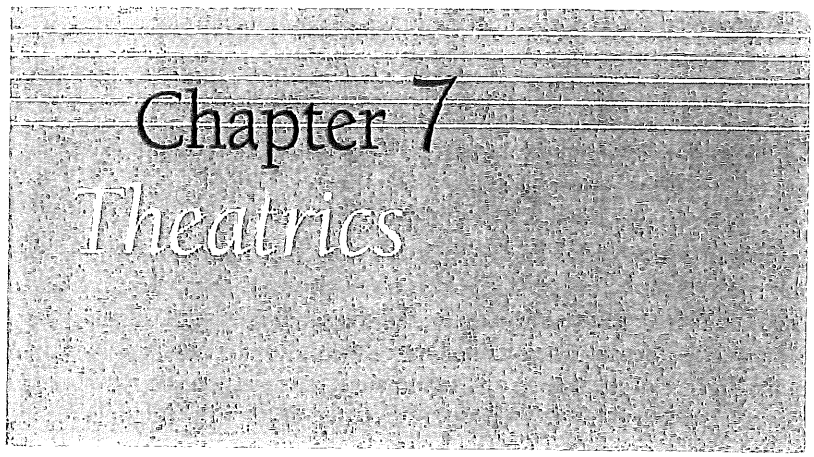
Strobovideolaryngoscopy can objectively measure vocal and pulmonary function. Speech and singing voice evaluation should also be performed before surgery is contemplated. Nodules, in particular, are often the result of misuse of the voice (talking or singing too loudly, too

long, too high, or too much at the same pitch) and can be corrected with the help of a good voice teacher and speech pathologist.

Voice rest may be prescribed as part of the recuperation routine following an acute injury or surgery. Total rest, when written communication is needed, is rarely recommended for more than two weeks. Relative voice rest, speaking only when necessary, is generally helpful whenever the vocal folds are affected by fatigue, illness, or injury. It should also be noted that both whistling and whispering may exert significant strain on the vocal folds. Singers should refrain from these activities during the time when voice rest is required.

Exercise

Exercise is no longer considered an option in a regimen for healthy living. It is clearly a fundamental necessity as critical to staying physically fit as proper hygiene and nutrition. As singers advance in age, exercise becomes even more important to overall physical conditioning and voice production. Without question, exercise has been shown to benefit the muscular, vascular, nervous, and respiratory systems and to promote a positive emotional attitude. The importance to good singing of a generally healthy body cannot be overlooked or underestimated. Keeping the body and voice fit takes attention and it takes work.



The ultimate goal of most singers is to share their music, either as a member of a group or as a soloist. The conductor or director of a group explains its style of presentation to performers, but solo singers must choose their own.

Most singers, when they first begin to perform, are extremely nervous. In fact, it can be counted on. But as performances progress, there is an increase in the ease and effectiveness with which one sings. Singers, unlike instrumentalists, do not express themselves through an object apart from their person. They literally expose themselves to success and failure. Regardless of circumstances, committed singers keep working and sharing. Focusing intense concentration on giving to the audience often helps channel the increased energy felt in the preperformance hours, and being, not acting, the character adds magnetism on stage.

Studying Other Disciplines

To become a charismatic singing performer requires many components. It is highly advisable to study piano, acting, and movement (fencing, dance, and so on). The contribution of all of these to a high quality performance in every style of singing, from pop to opera, is enormous. These disciplines need not be studied exhaustively—even two years' work in each would be helpful—but the importance of their integration into performance preparation cannot be overemphasized.

Piano

The study of piano is important because of the basic musical knowledge it can afford. It is essential for intelligent communication with accompanists, musical arrangers, or a conductor in a group situation. If students periodically hum along with music they are playing during their practice session, a facility in sight reading will often develop rapidly. In addition, much will be learned about basic musical terminology concerning volume levels and expression markings.

Acting

Studying acting is helpful in order to learn to project and to concentrate, to think thoughts appropriate to a given character or situation. To interpret a song honestly, it is important to master the technique of having thoughts logically connected to the song, not only while singing the text, but also during instrumental introductions, interludes, and conclusions. For example, during an instrumental introduction, singers should not be thinking about the temperature of the room or the possible reactions to their performance. Instead, if one is singing "Beneath a Weeping Willow's Shade," the singer might picture a girl in eighteenth-century dress sitting under a willow, despairing over the departure of her loved one—a sentiment common even today. The dominant attitude the performer might adopt for this song—and one must always be adopted—might be compassion. This attitude, and visualization of the pictures and thoughts of the text, must be maintained, without interruption, until the conclusion of the song. Relate, *relate,* RELATE!

In addition, acting, which, like singing, is a learned technique, will introduce the singer to various ways of using the body to communicate ideas and feelings. This is another critical aspect of effective presentation of all styles. "Feeling it," without training in the specifics and effects of movement, is, like singing naturally, almost never good enough. Courses in acting fundamentals and programs integrating voice, acting, and dance, such as music theater or opera workshops, are absolutely essential for a singer of any style of music.

Movement and dance

Like acting, movement and dance give performers an awareness of the picture they are making onstage and will teach them to project energetically to an audience. From ballet to jazz, much can be learned about posture and stance, and the impact caused by even the smallest gesture. Fencing is helpful for male singers, particularly in the area of operatic singing.

Styles of Singing

Broadly speaking, there are three general categories or styles of singing, as noted earlier. They are classical, popular, and theater. For the sake of versatility, a performer will sometimes cross over from one category to another. But the general practice is that one of the styles will usually be of considerably greater appeal to a singer than the other two, and in that one the performer will specialize. Songs in the anthology in this volume are taken from all three areas. Because the manner of presentation for every style varies considerably, a brief overview of each will be given.

Classical Singing

Classical singing, which includes opera, oratorio, and recital, as well as most "legitimate" music for the church, demands, by tradition, that a great deal be communicated with practically no stage movement.

Stance

As in the other areas, much can be communicated by stance. If the song is prayerful, it might well by sung with the feet placed more closely together. If the song is assertive, the feet might be planted firmly apart. The singer might lean slightly forward if the character of the song is telling a story, particularly with an excited or earnest attitude. One might lean somewhat backward if the song conveys a passive or depressed text. The singer seldom, if ever, takes a step during the song. In a recital setting, the singer might choose to stand close to the piano, in its curve, while singing something of an intimate nature, such as a lullaby, and somewhat in front of it for an assertive song, such as a sea chantey.

Visual focus

The visual focus in all styles of singing is determined by the text of the song. A narrative song, such as "See the Waters A-Gliding" (see the Anthology), will be sung looking directly at the audience (periodically changing the place of focus, in accordance with the music). "Simple," because of the deeply personal nature of its text, should be sung to an imagined person being addressed, with minimal shift of focus and virtually no body movement.

Performance

Songs of the classical type, called *art songs,* are performed exactly as the composer wrote them. With the exception of contemporary music, there is usually no extemporaneous styling. Spontaneous expression, a vital part of all performances, must fit well within the dictates of the composer's score. Classical singers must also prepare songs and arias in several languages besides English—notably, Italian, French, German, and Spanish.

Since performances of classical music are usually not electronically amplified, the classical singer is trained to sing without benefit of a microphone, which is good discipline for theater and pop singers also.

Dress for the classical singer is usually formal. Suits or tuxedos for men are the norm, with long dresses for women. Solid-colored dresses with long sleeves will focus attention on the singer's face. Prints on a dress fabric are often distracting. Basic rules for good dressing apply to onstage performance as well. Numerous books are available on the subject.

Presentation

Audiences frequently pass lasting judgment on a performer during the first minute onstage. Because of that, and because an entrance can be used to help set a mood for a program, it should be worked through carefully and practiced many times. When it is time to go onstage, the singer should locate a spot to stand where the lights will show him to best advantage. Then one should walk confidently to that predetermined spot, looking straight ahead. It is important never to look down, since a lowered gaze can signify confusion or discomfort to an audience. For a smooth walk, the abdominals should be contracted, as in dance, and the arms should move in opposition to the feet. As the singer greets the audience, during both entrances and bows, friendliness and an enormous desire to communicate must be projected. Finally, handing music to an

accompanist, if that is necessary, should be carefully practiced, making sure that the singer's profile, not his posterior, is facing the room.

Popular Singing

Popular singing currently includes many styles, such as folk, country, jazz, and rock. In pop singing, the emphasis is on individuality, in both dress and presentation. The performer in this style of music is encouraged to be "packaged" as uniquely as possible. Dress is often determined by the type of picture the performer wishes to present to enhance the style of music being sung. Concert videos are filled with examples. Stage movements for the pop singer might run the gamut from that described for the classical singer to a no-holds-barred, carefully choreographed dance routine.

Microphone technique

Good microphone technique is a must. "Paging" the mike, the moving of the cord, if there is one, back in the direction of the amplifier while holding the mike in the opposite hand, requires practice. Also, experimentation is necessary to figure out the proper distance from the singer's mouth to the microphone in order to ensure the desired vocal effect. For more "presence," intensified contact, in an intimate song, the microphone must be held close to the singer. For high or loud tones, the distance will be greater.

Sets

To secure a club date, the pop singer needs to have thoroughly prepared in excess of forty songs of various types, which are divided into groups, or *sets*. Sets, each containing approximately six songs, can be assembled using different strategies. One basic pattern might resemble the following:

Opener	positive text, up-tempo
Credibility Song	sincere lyrics, slower than the opener
Slow Song	
Song of Choice	new or unfamiliar
False Ending	dramatic, up-tempo
Encore	more subdued than the False Ending, meaningful for the audience

Sets must be assembled with careful thought to the overall effect of the various styles, harmonies, and lyrics.

Lead sheets

Pop songs are usually learned from *lead sheets* (see Figure 7.1), on which only the melody line is given and the letter names for chords indicated. That is, no specific notes are indicated for the accompaniment, so instrumentalists are free to improvise. Unlike classical and theater singing, the performance of popular songs in transposed keys, either higher or lower than they were originally written, is not only acceptable but expected. Original arrangements of a song, which often completely change its mood, are prized, but must relate well to the lyrics or the environment of the performance.

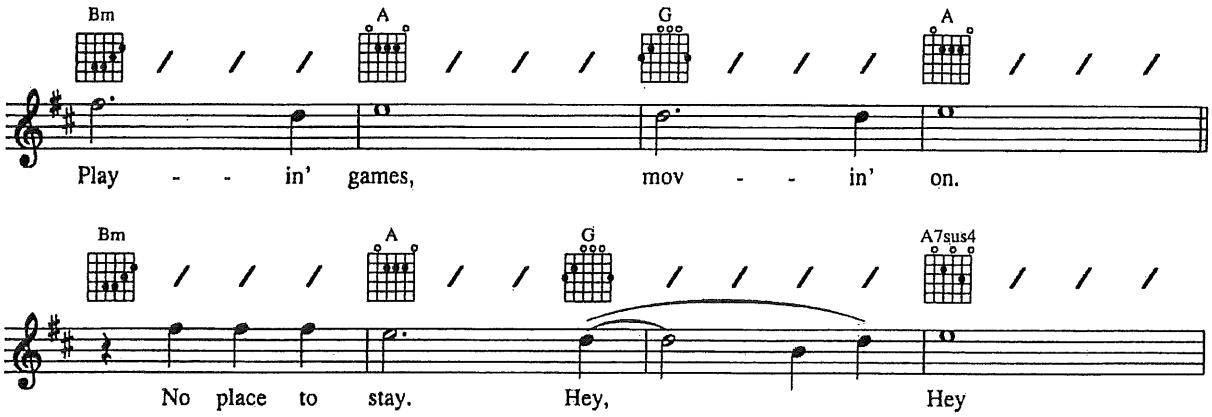


Figure 7.1
Excerpt from lead sheet

Adjusting range

Since, at the moment, some commercial sounds that are selling best require men to sing in the head and falsetto registers and women to sing primarily in the chest and middle registers, pop singers will frequently sing higher or lower than they would if they were doing classical or theater singing. But because singers should vocalize over at least a three octave range, this adjustment in ranges should be comfortable if all other aspects of good vocal production are heeded. If vocal difficulties arise from an attempt to sing a song, the pitches of the melody can be modified to accommodate the performer.

Theater Singing

Owing to its origins, the category of singing most influenced by the theater is musical theater. The ability to "project" dramatically frequently precedes most musical considerations, especially in the early training of new musical theater performers. "Belting," a style of singing done at a loud volume level in which the chest register is used to its uppermost limits, is taught as a quick way to add energy to a singing performance. Although it might be necessary to belt in order to effectively portray many characters in a musical theater production, ultimately this technique is far from desirable in terms of vocal health. As with any style of extreme vocal production, it should be carefully monitored. On the other hand, the idea of portraying a rough-spoken character using only dialogue, and reverting to a refined style of singing for that person's songs, is totally incongruous. Although it is a huge temptation to believe that belting is the ultimate theatrical singing style, it is extremely important that theater students take great pains to develop an excellent singing technique, so that they can use voice production suitable to different types of characters. They need to be aware of the potential vocal hazards that might occur, and know how to create their roles in a vocally healthy manner. Hoarseness, often heard among actors, is not an indication of vocal health and can be avoided.

Selling the song

"Selling" the song, in all styles of singing, is the fundamental goal. Specifically, "selling" refers to dramatic components, including energy level, concentration, and characterization and, as in life, a consciousness of listener reaction. For the successful musical theater performer—for any performer—all these must be present to the greatest extent possible. Although stage and/or body microphones are almost always used for theater productions, enormous energy must emanate from the actors themselves.

Auditions

For musical theater auditions, songs are sung only in the original keys and by performers for whom they are appropriate. (Some of the theater songs in the anthology have been transposed for convenience in class use.) For example, a man's song is never sung by a woman, using modified lyrics. A director will usually indicate whether songs are to be sung from the show being cast or from other shows. Failure to pay attention to the director's request indicates laziness and insufficient interest in the show and frequently eliminates a performer from consideration. Again, selling a "package" is of the utmost importance. The auditioner should always be familiar with the proposed show and try to look, sing, and act similar to, but not exactly like, the character he or she hopes to play. An attempt to identify totally with a character might well work to the auditioner's disadvantage, since the director often has strong ideas about characterization and needs to feel an actor is willing to be flexible enough to create the role as the director sees fit. It is important to inquire about the director's preferences.

Because performers for musical theater auditions must often dance as well as read and sing, they should come dressed ready to move. They should be well groomed, with the hair back from the face, and should look nicely dressed. Stylish jeans and a T-shirt or a leotard with a wrap-around skirt, or other dance clothes, are often the most appropriate apparel.

Concluding Comments

Although there are major differences among the three categories of singing, they have much in common. A sense of appreciation for performers in all styles is certainly in order, and audiences are usually eager to offer it. As singers first begin to perform, it cannot be expected that the proficiency they have mastered during private practice will be retained in performance. To learn to concentrate and communicate in performance takes persistent effort. Gradually, however, singers will notice—with pleasure—that they are becoming more skilled and effective before an audience. And pleasure, after all, is what music is all about.

Revered singer Marian Anderson said of the relationship with her audiences, "The knowledge other people have expended on me has kept me going when times were hard. That knowledge has been a responsibility, a challenge, and an inspiration. It has been the path to development and growth."

Chapter 8
Music Reading

It happens often that while searching for music, singers will find a song that they have heard only once or twice. They like the text and music, but cannot remember exactly how the melody moves. Choir members sometimes have parts they wish they could learn prior to a rehearsal. A pianist is not always available, and for that reason, it is highly advisable to develop some ability to read music. It is a simple and basic skill, which even children can learn.

One of the fastest ways to learn this skill, which is really not difficult and only takes practice, is to enroll in a beginning piano or music reading class. As a brief introduction, here is a summary of some of the basic facts. Select a song in the Anthology to refer to when reading this chapter.

All traditional music is written on a five-line structure called a *staff.*

Commonly, higher pitches are indicated in the G clef, or *treble clef,*

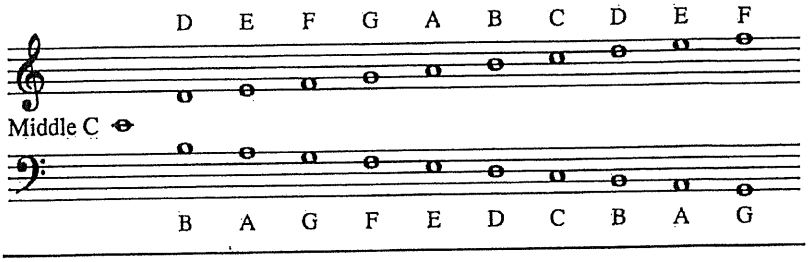


Figure 8.1

while low pitches are shown in the F clef, or *bass clef.*

The most frequently sung pitches are drawn on the staffs shown in Figure 8.1. Although both clefs extend beyond these points, the illustration begins at middle C, a note located near the insignia above the piano keyboard, at its center.

For years, many people have used mnemonic devices to memorize the letter names of the pitches quickly (for instance, All Cows Eat Grass), in which the first letter of each word is the same as a note on the staff (see Figure 8.2). In the case of All Cows Eat Grass, the letters correspond to the letter names of the notes located in the spaces (between the staff lines) of the bass clef. Good Boys Do Fine Always may be used to help memorize the notes on the lines. These sentences always work from the bottom to the top of the staff. The classic Every Good Boy Does Fine assists with learning the notes on the lines in the treble clef, and the letters of the word *FACE* are the same as the notes in the spaces of the treble clef.

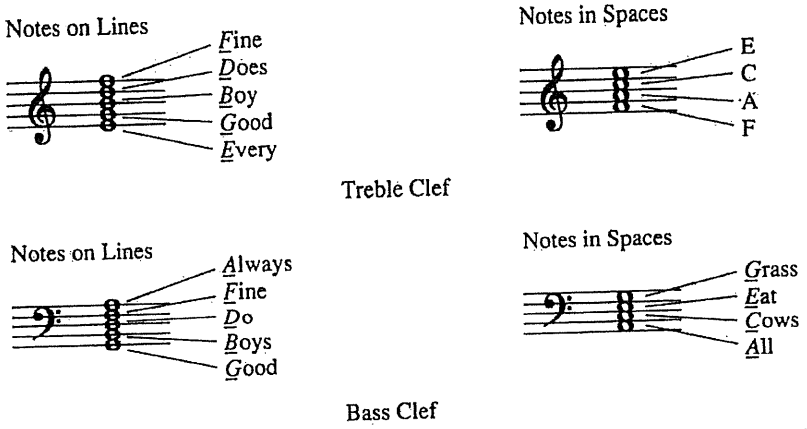
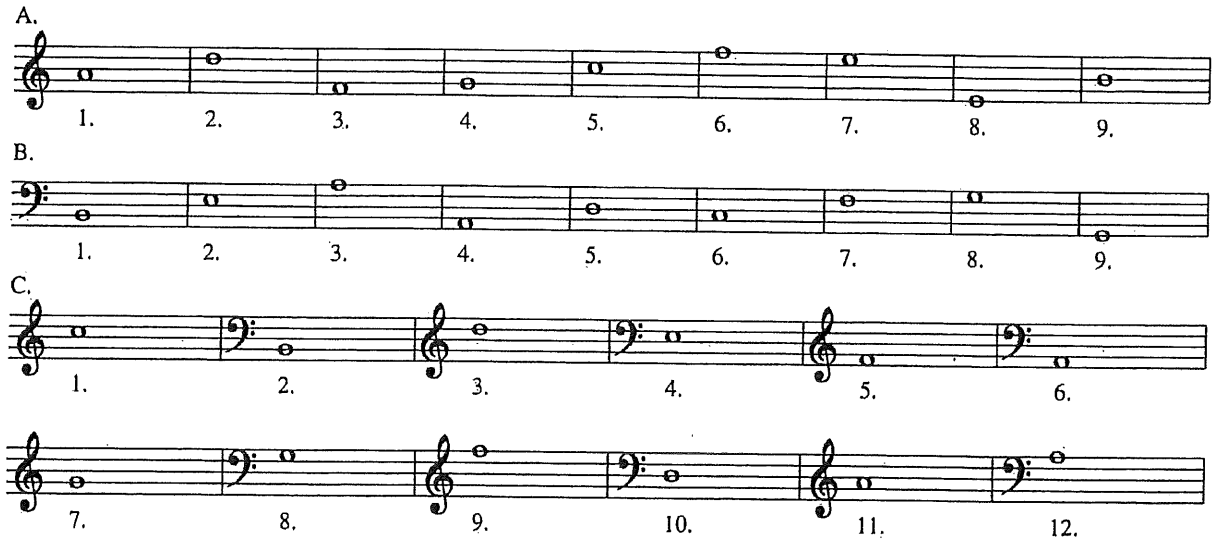


Figure 8.2

Exercise 8.1

At this point, it might be helpful to review the foregoing by identifying the pitches in Exercise 8.1. (The answers are given in inverted type directly below it.) For more review, use a beginning piano book.

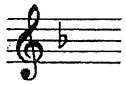


Answers
A. 1-A, 2-D, 3-F, 4-G, 5-C, 6-F, 7-E, 8-E, 9-B
B. 1-B, 2-E, 3-A, 4-A, 5-D, 6-C, 7-F, 8-G, 9-G
C. 1-C, 2-B, 3-D, 4-E, 5-F, 6-A, 7-G, 8-G, 9-F, 10-D, 11-A, 12-A

On the piano keyboard (see foldout keyboard inside cover), even easier to memorize than the letter names of notes, one can readily spot the groups of two and three black keys. To the left of a group of two black keys is always a C, and to the right of them, an E. To the left of a group of three black keys is an F, and to the right of them, a B. The keys between the four keys mentioned are arranged in alphabetical order from A to G and simply repeat that pattern.

Using the keyboard and covering its typed letters, practice identifying the white keys until they are easily memorized.

At the beginning of a song, the key signature (sharps and flats) is usually indicated. A piano key's sharp (♯) is found immediately to its right, while its flat (♭) is found immediately to its left. A sharp will sound higher than the natural key, while the flat will sound lower. Flats and sharps can be white keys or black keys. The pitches to which the key signature applies can be determined by figuring out the name of the pitch that is located in the same place as the sharp or flat. For example,



indicates a flat on the third line of the treble clef. The note always found on the third line of the treble clef is a B; therefore, the flat indicates a

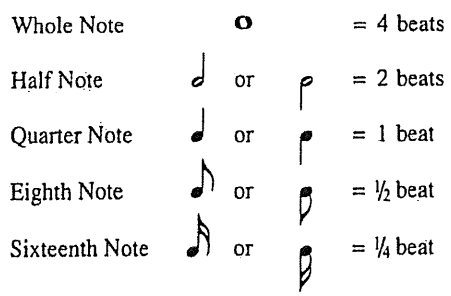


Figure 8.3

B flat. This means that any B found in the music, even though it may be higher or lower, will be flatted.

Locate the flats and sharps of all the white keys.

The component of music reading that requires the most practice for many is rhythm. The staff is divided into *measures* by vertical lines. A *time signature*, at the beginning of a song, consists of two numbers, one above the other. The upper number indicates the number of beats per measure; the lower number shows the type of note that gets one beat. In the time signature $\frac{4}{4}$, the upper 4 shows that there are four beats per measure, while the lower 4 means that a quarter note gets one beat. In a $\frac{3}{8}$ time signature, there are three beats per measure, and an eighth note gets one beat.

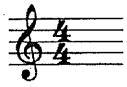


Figure 8.3 lists the most common rhythmic values used in notation. When a dot follows a note, it becomes half again as long as it would ordinarily be. For example, when a note that gets two beats is followed by a dot, it would then get three beats.

Practice clapping the rhythms in Exercise 8.2. When they can be clapped without hesitation, recite, or pencil in, the letter names of the pitches to which the rhythms correspond. When the letter names can be recited readily, recite and clap them in rhythm. Next, practice playing the melodies on the keyboard. (Melodies for songs may be approached in the same manner.)

Rests, or silences, are designated in a manner similar to that for notes (see Figure 8.4). For example, the whole rest usually gets four beats.

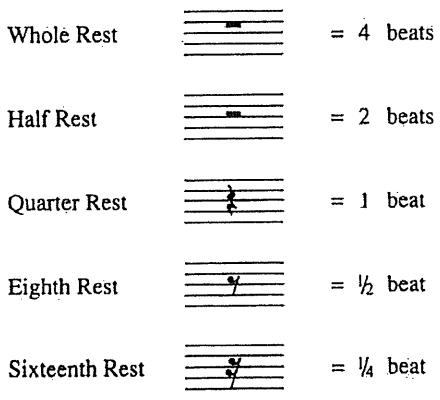
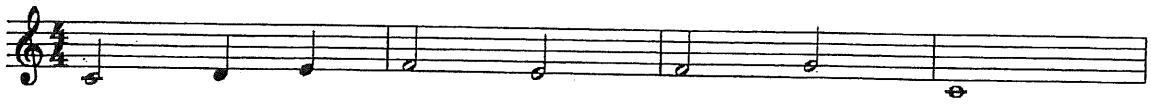
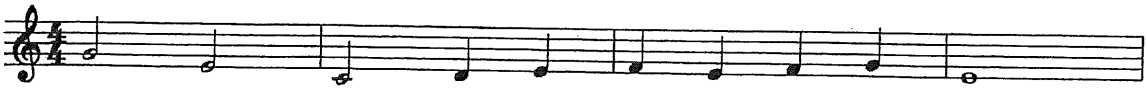
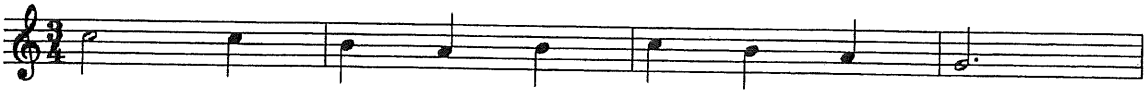
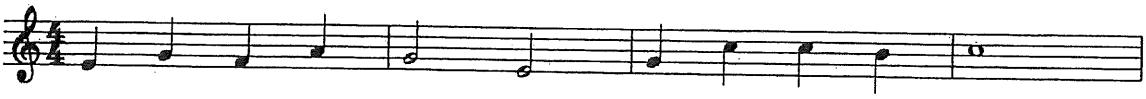
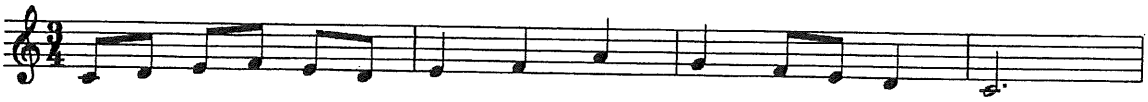
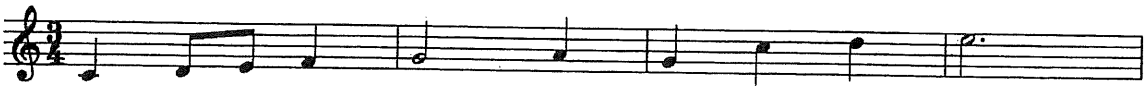
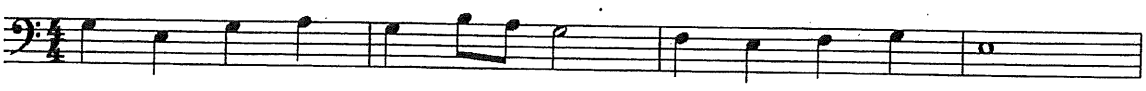
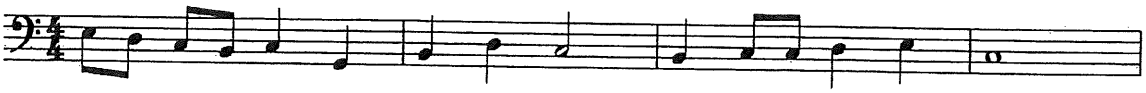
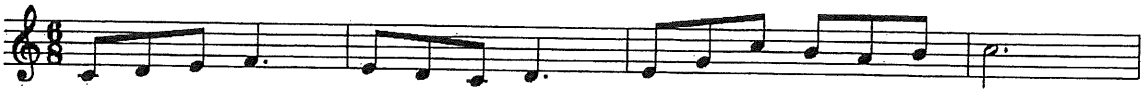
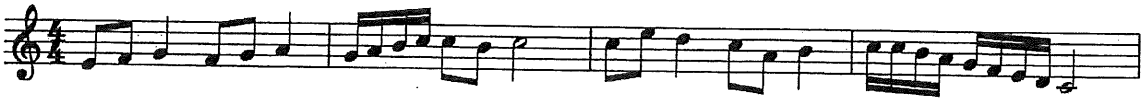


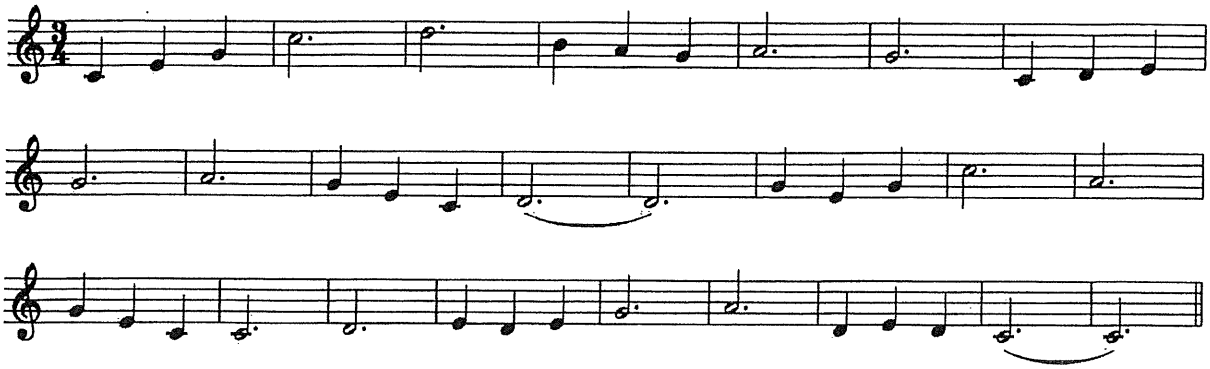
Figure 8.4

Exercise 8.2

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. 
8. 
9. 
10. 

Exercise 8.3

Play the following melody. It should sound familiar.

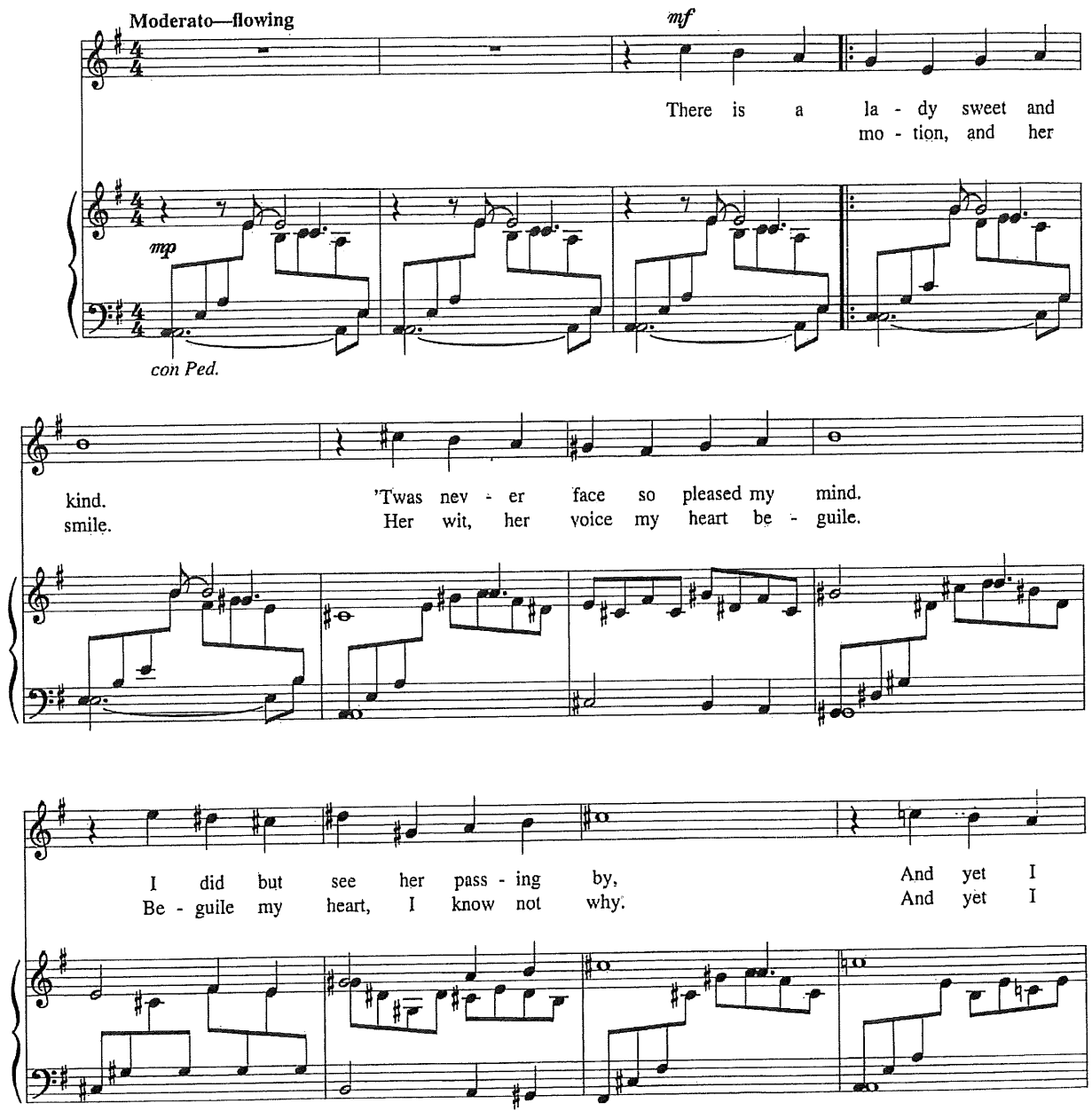


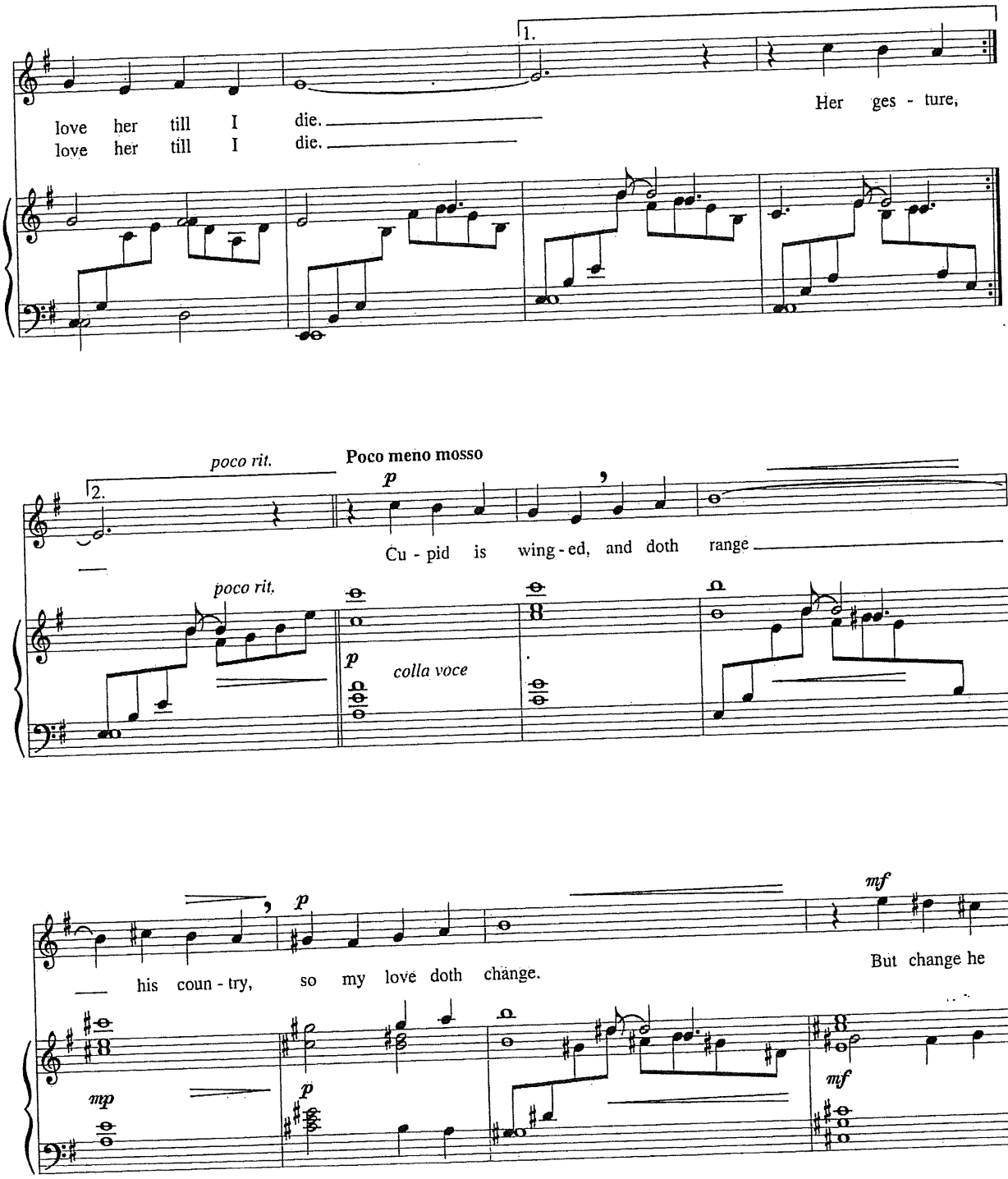
There Is a Lady Sweet and Kind

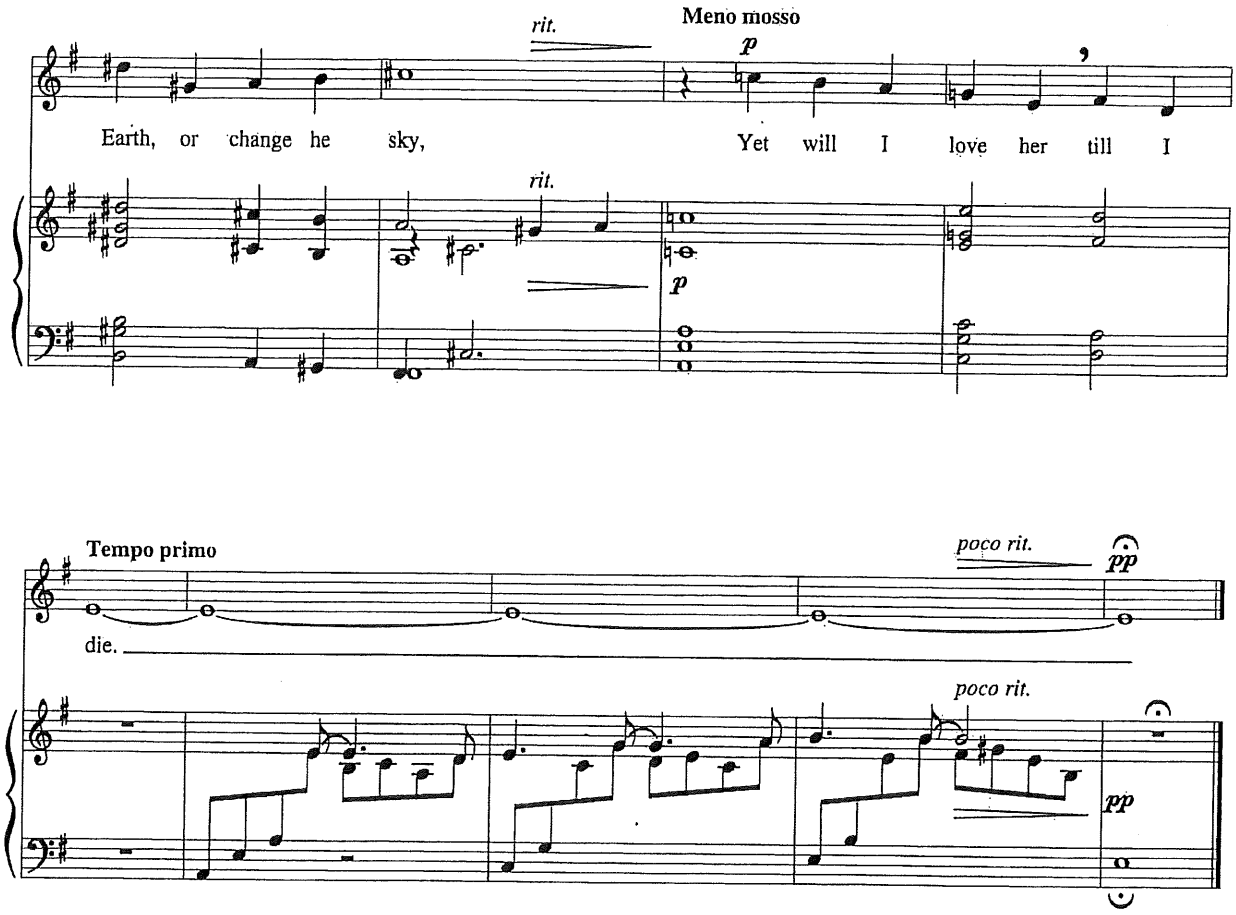
Adapted from poem by
Thomas Ford
(1580–1648)

Roger L. Nelson

Background and Performance Notes, page 68
CD 2, Track 22




1.
love her till I die.
love her till I die.
Her ges - ture,
poco rit.
Poco meno mosso
2.
p
Cu - pid is wing - ed, and doth range
poco rit.
p
colla voce
p
his coun - try, so my love doth change.
mf
But change he
mp
p
mf


rit.
Meno mosso
p
Earth, or change he sky,
Yet will I love her till I
rit.
p
Tempo primo
poco rit.
pp
die.
poco rit.
pp