

HOW TO BE A GREAT TENOR

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

A great tenor...

- is aware of her responsibility within the overtone series to create a sound conducive to perpetuating and enhancing the overtone "stack", and creates the overtone on every note
- is aware of the location of octaves (& which part is on other end of that octave) in every song
- resonates her high notes as well and completely as her low notes
- knows the difference between singing soprano and singing tenor
- sings with "ring"
- sings her part with melodic confidence
- knows the lead line almost as well as she knows her own, enabling her to anticipate her relationship to the lead within the cone as she sings
- knows that she must sing "down into" the sound below her while maintaining her lift and ring
- knows how to balance (volume and quality match) when under the lead note (those annoying x's) and when singing in dissonant harmony
- realizes the importance of equally strong head tone and chest tone, ultimately being able to mix registers to provide the vocal strength necessary to balance the chord when she is below the lead
- is skilled at the full range of barbershop embellishments
- understands the tuning issues and relationship between tenor and each of the other three parts, especially major 3rds and flat 7ths
- understands her intervallic relationship with "doh" at all times, and maintains tonal centre
- realizes the need for constant vocal energy
- doesn't need to sing loud to sing with energy
- realizes the importance of vocal flexibility
- knows when to use vibrato and how much
- maintains the dimension of her sound:
 - moving through the register break, ascending and descending
 - moving through dynamic changes, especially decrescendo
 - moving through difficult intervals, ascending and descending
 - at any tempo and using any rhythm
- Uses her body properly to give her sound freedom
- Uses her internal focus (tongue, palate, teeth)
- Explores freedom from thinking while performing
- Sings from her soul
- Is open to change
- Explores new ways of thinking and doing
- Knows that she is always in the process of growing
- thinks her part IS the melody!

Handout #1

A Great Tenor/Performer

Uses her body properly to give her sound wings!

Uses her internal focus.

Explores freedom from thinking while performing.

Allows herself to experience what has become natural.

Sings from her soul.

Isn't afraid to let the world inside.

Is open to change.

Explores new ways of thinking and doing.

Knows that she is always in the process of growing.

Handout #2

Resonance, Breath, and Phonation

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

Resonance is required for vocal beauty and power.

It is created by the singer's free and open vocal space.

Breath is required for vocal beauty and power.

It is the result of a free and relaxed vocal instrument that understands that breathing is the management of air, not simply sheer lung capacity.

Many bad vocal habits are efforts of protection against clumsy management of breath.

Breath Phonation is required for vocal beauty and power.

Phonation is the creation of sound.

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

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

Spin

A tone, which spins, is unencumbered and unforced, free and continuous.

Ring

A complex system of high frequency overtones produced by brilliance and projection within a relaxed and open vocal mechanism.

Handout #3

Final Thoughts

1. Looking for a quartet? Find the right three voices with which to sing that have compatible vocal qualities and personal performance goals.
2. Continuously develop your performing & singing skills.
3. The technique of singing your part should enable your voice to artistically create the barbershop sound (e.g., color, texture, balance, blend). It does not change the essence of your voice.

How To be a Great Tenor

Don Kahl helps you improve your tenor-singing techniques.

Submitted by Don Kahl, tenor, Rural Route 4, 1986 International Quartet Champion

Describing how to sing great tenor is a bit like demonstrating how to dry one's back without using one's hands. You pretty much learn by doing and not by reading. Does reading an article in a golf magazine help your game? There are, however, some tips that are translatable to your tenor-singing techniques.

Sometimes, in our attempt to conserve enough air to maintain support through a phrase, we don't achieve preparatory breath well in the first place. Make the breath part of the release while forming the next intended target.

Barbershop performers are always behind the focus of the ensemble sounds we create. Listen carefully.

Shift body weight at appropriately frequent intervals. Maintain shoulder posture, and keep chin and Adam's apple in a comfortably low position.

There is no such thing in justly-tuned barbershop tenor singing as a half step. Tenors need to work diligently to sing in tune with the lead. Be alert to the need for lifting or settling certain intervals as you rehearse and perform.

The chord that the audience perceives as ringing is because of instantaneous adjustments. A tenor and his lead can never duet too much.

Imagining or looping one's performance is excellent for creating a consistent and positive frame of mind. Run through your entire performance in your mind. The more you prepare yourself the more confident you'll be. Rehearse not just enough to get it right, but enough to never get it wrong.

Every tenor I ever heard, to a greater or lesser degree, was and is one of my favorites. But there are three men who are at the top of my personal list. Each of these men was blessed with consistently accurate melody singers. (Tuning is less a problem when the melody is well sung.) Two of these men may not be as well known as the third, but they are giants to me and taught me well.

- Gene Cokcroft was flawless as he sang with the Suntones, and he has an unbelievably beautiful voice. For his unfailing artistry in every performance, he tops my list.

- Ed Rooker sang with the Central States District's legendary Merry Mugs quartet in the early days in my barbershopping life. The happiness that filled Ed's eyes when they performed has been a beacon to me during some of my most stressful performances.
- Dale Radford possessed a crisp, lyrical and clear, almost Irish tenor quality. I recall his voice atop more than one Southwestern District foursome. Watching him taught me much of what I now describe as instant matchability.

But, as I said earlier, and I mean it, every tenor is my hero. To Gene Cokecroft, Dale Radford and the late Ed Rooker, my everlasting thanks for what you taught and gave me. Now, if anybody wants to know even more firsthand how we pass on the gospel of great barbershop tenor singing, come to Harmony College someday, and I'll see you in class.

Don's eight tips for better tenor singing

- Breathe to consume air, not to conserve air
- Finish phrases with a breath
- Listen harder
- Move feet to stay fresh
- There are no half-step intervals
- Duet the melody
- Rehearse until error-free -- then do it again
- Loop your performance