**The Craft of Singing**

**By Joni Bescos**

**Tenor**

In barbershop music, the tenor is the highest of the four voice parts- a harmony part sung above the

melody. The average range extends from f (above *middle* c') to *f'* (an octave higher), occasionally extending down to e' and up to a b" or a".

Since one of the primary characteristics of barbershop music is its cone-shaped sound, the tenor must sing with a lighter production than that used by the lower voices, without sacrificing clarity or brilliance. Her quality must complement, but never overshadow, that of the lead voice. The tenor sings mostly in her upper register (head voice), but she must be able to add to that the heavier lower register (chest voice) quality for the lower notes in her range. Lyric sopranos generally make good tenors, but the coloratura, dramatic or mezzo soprano must be able to lighten the voice quality and remove any excessive vibrato in order to become a good barbershop tenor.

Pitches in the tenor range are resonated in the area of the pharynx directly behind the mouth (oropharynx) and in the area behind the soft palate (naso-pharynx). It is important for tenors to keep the soft palate open so that the naso-pharynx is available for resonation; a closed soft palate will result in a covered or muffled sound, lacking clarity and brilliance.

Very often our arrangements require the tenor to sing a few notes under the lead. When this occurs, the

tenor must broaden her quality on the note(s) in question so that the chord(s) will remain in balance.

Finally, the tenor must have a good ear so that she can tune to the chord. Like baritones, tenors frequently sing the thirds and sevenths of a chord- the two tones which require the greatest degree of pitch adjustment from the equally-tempered scale. These notes must be "tuned" so that chords will "lock."

**Lead**

The lead is one of the two middle voice parts in barbershop music, and she generally sings the melody. The average lead range extends from a (below *middle* c') to b' (above *middle* c'), occasionally extending down to g, and up to c".

Because she carries the melody, the lead must sing with authority, clarity, and with a consistent quality

throughout her range. When the lead sings below *middle* c', she must be able to use a rich, full, lower register (chest voice) production to project those low tones and remain in balance. As her part goes into the octave above *middle c',* she needs to gradually mix in the upper register (head voice) so that tone production is shared by the two registers, with the upper register becoming predominant as the part line reaches *high* c".

The lead sings with enough vibrato to add color and warmth to the sound, but not so much that chords

cannot lock, or that it becomes difficult for the harmony parts to tune to her part.

The range of the lead part requires use of all the pharyngeal areas for resonance. The soft palate must be

kept open to avoid constriction of the throat on higher tones, which will result in a pinched or strained vocal quality, and to allow resonation of the harmonics that add brilliance to the voice. Since all parts tune to the lead, it is essential that she possess an accurate sense of pitch.

Finally, since the lead sings the melody, she is the one responsible for conveying the interpretation,

emotion and inflection of the song. The other three parts literally "follow her lead" in delivery of dynamics

and tempo, and support her inflection, artistry and finesse.

**Baritone**

The baritone is the other one of the two middle voice parts in barbershop music- a harmony part sung

both below and above the melody, depending on where the melody is situated. Baritone differs from the alto part in traditional chorus music because the baritone part frequently crosses over the melody (lead}. The average baritone range extends from g (below *middle* c'} to a' (above *middle c'},* and sometimes up to bb' or b'.

Though the baritone and lead sing in the same basic range, the techniques for singing the two parts are

quite different. Unlike the lead, the baritone voice should never be clearly identifiable. The baritone sings

throughout her range with less clarity and brilliance than that used by the lead. She must be constantly aware of her position in the chord, and flexible enough to adjust her tone production whenever that position, in relation to the lead, changes. When she is singing below the lead, she uses a rich, full sound that helps to solidify the relationship between lead and bass. When she is above the lead, she uses a lighter production, similar to that used by the tenor. The baritone sings a relatively straight tone, with a minimum of vibrato.

The range of the baritone part requires use of all the pharyngeal areas for resonation. The soft palate must be kept open to avoid constriction of the throat on higher tones.

Finally, the baritone must have a good ear so that she can tune to the chord. Like tenors, baritones

frequently sing the thirds and sevenths of a chord- the two tones that require the greatest degree of pitch

adjustment from the equally tempered scale. These notes must be "tuned" so that chords will lock. The

baritone is sometimes described as "singing the leftovers," or "singing the missing note." The tenor sings the highest note in a chord, the bass the lowest, the lead the melody, and the baritone sings the all-important missing note.

**Bass**

In barbershop music, the bass is the lowest of the four voice parts - a harmony part sung below the

melody. The average bass range extends from **d** (below *middle c'}* to f' (above *middle c'},* occasionally

extending down to *C,* an octave below *middle c'.*

Since one of the primary characteristics of barbershop music is its cone-shaped sound, the bass must sing with a heavier production than that used by the upper voices, and she will actually sing with more volume than used by any part above her. The harmonic structure of barbershop music assists the bass in providing a firm foundation for the sound by giving her either the root or the fifth of each chord; other tones may occasionally be given to her in passing, or for special effects. Ideally, the bass and lead work as a team; the lead sings the melody, and the bass provides the harmonic foundation.

The bass sings mostly in her lower register (chest voice) with a rich, full, broad tone that has clarity and

focus. She needs to maintain an open soft palate for proper resonation of tones in the higher portion of her range, where her quality needs to be lighter and more lead-like. The bass sings a relatively straight tone, with a minimum of vibrato. The range of the bass part is comparable to that of a contralto in traditional choral music.

Occasionally an arrangement will give the melody to the bass for a few isolated notes, for a phrase or for

an entire verse. When this occurs, the bass adds sufficient color (vibrato} to her voice to make the melody

easily identifiable and the lead sings more like a baritone.

Because the bass generally sings the root or fifth of the chord- the notes that do not require tuning- she

need not be constantly aware of tuning her note to lock the chord. She must, however, be attuned to the

lead to insure that those two parts are in tune with each other. If an accurate lead-bass relationship exists, the other two harmony parts will find it easy to tune, and to lock chords. *)I*