

Sight Singing 1

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SIGHT SINGING 1

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Vocabulary

Definite pitch: A pitch within a harmonic frequency spectrum. The listener can possibly (or relatively easily) discern the pitch (e.g., the pitch from a plucked guitar string).

Indefinite pitch: A sound or note that is relatively difficult or impossible to identify as a pitch. Sounds with indefinite pitch do not have harmonic spectra, or have an altered harmonic spectra (e.g., the sound from a drumstick striking a snare drum).

Tonal memory: The ability to recall a previously sounded tone. It assists with staying in tune and may be developed through ear training.

Pitch matching: The act of reproducing, with your voice, the pitch of a tone you hear.

Scalar motion: The act of moving along a collection of pitches arranged from lowest to highest or highest to lowest.

Half step: The smallest interval in Western music. There are twelve such intervals to an octave. A half step is represented on the piano keyboard by the distance between any two immediately adjacent keys, whether white or black (e.g., C-C# or E-F)

Whole step: An interval consisting of two half steps (e.g., C-D or F-G).

Solfeggio: The singing of scales, intervals and melodic exercises to solmization syllables. In moveable *do*, the syllables *do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti* are assigned to each note of the major scale (e.g., In the key of C, C is *do*, D is *re*, E is *mi*, etc.). The ascending chromatic scale is *do, di, re, ri, mi, fa, fi, sol, si, la, li, ti, do*; the descending chromatic scale is *do, ti, te, la, le, sol, se, fa, mi, me, re, ra, do*.

Number system: The singing of scales, intervals and melodic exercises using a numeral-based system (e.g., in the key of F, F is 1, G is 2, A is 3, etc.).

Root: In tonal harmony, the fundamental or generating pitch of a triad or chord (i.e., if the pitches of a chord are arranged as a series of superimposed thirds, the lowest pitch is the root).

Tempo: The rate of speed at which the beat occurs; it is the pace of the beat. Tempo is usually depicted with the directive ($\text{♩} = n$). For example, ($\text{♩} = 80$) instructs that there are 80 quarter notes per minute.

Metronome: A device used to indicate the tempo of a composition by sounding regular beats at adjustable speed.

Chapter 1: Introduction to Sight Singing

Foreword by the Author

Welcome to the world of sight singing. While you may have little to no experience in reading music at this time, you will soon find that with dedicated practice habits and an eagerness to perfect your craft, you will develop a strong foundation in reading and performing melodies and rhythms that you have never seen before. Through this process, you will strengthen your musical ears and tonal memory, and gain the confidence you need to be a first-call performing and recording singer/musician. Remember to always practice with a metronome, and consistently sing through new material each day. Practicing with friends is always a great way to hone your skills, and you can be just as productive using a piano (or keyboard) by yourself. However you practice, make sure you practice smart, work hard each day, and have fun!

Course Description

In this course, you will learn about the art of performing a piece of music on seeing it for the first time. With a combination of ear training, aural exercises, rhythm reading and sight singing melodies, you will develop a strong foundation in the skill of sight singing. This will be accomplished through the execution of tonal memory, pitch matching, singing exercises a capella, and interval reading. Through these studies, you will develop confident music reading skills and proper daily practice techniques, which will directly and positively impact your overall musicianship.

Objectives

Through this course, you will develop the necessary confidence to improve as a singer. You will learn how to read rhythms, recognize patterns within pieces of music, understand and execute solfege and other methods of solmization, and gain the ability to imagine the sound of intervals or pitches without the aid of an instrument. Through the development of appropriate practice habits, students will create an environment in which to securely and assertively explore and develop their sight singing abilities.

Chapter 2: Definite vs. Indefinite Pitch

Pitch is the perceived quality of a sound that is chiefly a function of its fundamental frequency. It is a perceptual property that allows the ordering of sounds on a frequency-related scale. Pitches are compared as “higher” and “lower” in the sense associated with musical melodies, which require sound whose frequency is clear and stable enough to distinguish from noise.

There are two basic forms of pitch, definite and indefinite. *Definite pitch* is a pitch within a harmonic frequency spectrum. The listener can possibly (or relatively easily) discern the pitch (e.g., the pitch from a plucked guitar string). On the contrary, *indefinite pitch* is a sound or note that is relatively difficult or impossible to identify as a pitch. Sounds with indefinite pitch do not have harmonic spectra, or have an altered harmonic spectra (e.g., the sound from a drumstick striking a snare drum).

In singing, we refer to melody as definite pitch. When singing anything that has a harmonic frequency (e.g., the melody of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”), you are performing a collection of definite pitches:

Ex. 1.1

Definite Pitch

Twin - kle, twin - kle, li - ttle star

There are also instances where we use spoken syllables within a composition. They may be spoken within a collection by themselves, or interspersed within collections of definite pitches:

Ex. 1.2

Indefinite Pitch

Ah ah ah ah ah ah ah!

Definite pitch: Indefinite pitch: Definite pitch:

Twin - kle, ah ah li - ttle star

Indefinite pitches usually contain a strong sense of rhythmic motion. For instance, a *ghost note* is a rhythmic indefinite pitch that usually acts as a pickup to a definite pitch.

Ex. 1.3

(Ghost note) (Ghost note)

Twin - kle, (uh) twin - kle, (uh) li - ttle star

Let's sing through some exercises that contain definite and indefinite pitches:

Ex. 1.4

Ah ah ah ah ah ah ah

Ex. 1.5

Ah ah

Ex. 1.6

Ah ah

When listening to songs on the radio, try to pick up on the differences between definite and indefinite pitch. Songs that are sung are comprised mostly of definite pitch, but you will notice that indefinite pitches often make their appearance throughout. Tools like spoken syllables and ghost notes are useful and effective stylistic embellishments that every singer should be aware of.

Chapter 3: Pitch Matching and Tonal Memory

Pitch Matching

Pitch matching is the act of reproducing with your voice the pitch of a tone you hear. It is the most basic and most important ear-training skill, and is therefore needed to serve as the foundation and starting point for all ear training. The act of perfectly matching a pitch is processing the point of reference that you aurally receive to replicate the pitch or frequency of the tone correctly.

You may practice matching pitch by playing a single note on the piano, and then singing that note using an open vowel like “oh” or “ah.”

Tonal Memory

Tonal memory is the ability to recall a previously sounded tone. It assists with staying in tune and may be developed through ear training. As musicians, we often develop a natural form of tonal memory. For instance, when we hear a song on the radio (whether it be for the hundredth or in some cases the first time), we can often sing exactly or roughly the same notes of the melody, without the song playing in the background. Tonal memory develops over time. The more you surround yourself with music, the greater sense of tonal center you will obtain.

To test and develop your tonal memory, have a friend play a series of notes on the piano. Focus on each note as they pass, recognize any patterns you hear. Stay rooted in the tonal center, and sing the notes back. At first, begin with one or two notes, and then keep adding notes as you become more comfortable with this exercise.

Now, let’s practice matching pitch and work on developing tonal memory. We’ll sing the scale first and then perform exercises in the same key. This will help us find our tonal center.

Key of C

C Major Scale:



Ex. 1.7



Ex. 1.8



Key of D

D Major Scale:



Ex. 1.9



Ex. 1.10

**Key of E \flat** E \flat Major Scale

Ex. 1.11



Ex. 1.12



Chapter 4: Introduction to the Major Scale

The Major Scale

Centered to the structure of Western tonal music is the *major* (or *diatonic*) scale. Let's take a look at the major scale in several different keys. Once you feel comfortable singing the scale, practice the scalar exercises that follow.

Key of C

C Major Scale:



Ex. 1.13



Ex. 1.14



Key of A

A Major Scale:



Ex. 1.15



Ex. 1.16

