

Vocal Performance 1

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Chapter 1: Background Information

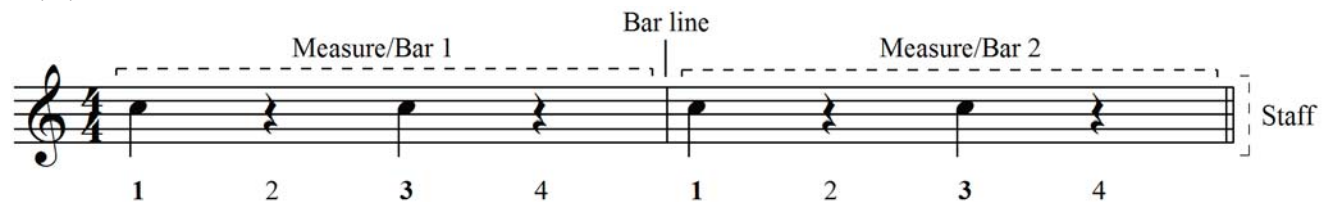
Rock

This unit's song is in the rock genre—a genre that has come a long way since its inception in the 1940s-1950s and original rock'n'roll moniker. Contemporary rock is known for its strongly emotional vocal performances (often sung in the lower register), guitar-driven harmonies, and drum patterns that often emphasize the downbeat.

Measures/Bars and Downbeats

A measure or “bar” is a segment of time in a piece of music—a way of telling musicians where they are within a song. Measures are signified by vertical bar lines in the staff (with the staff being the five horizontal lines that hold the notes). The first beat of a measure is called the “downbeat.” Although this is originally an orchestral term (denoting the downward motion of the conductor's baton at the start of each new bar), it is still employed in contemporary music. Rock songs are often written in the 4/4 time signature, with an emphasis on the downbeat. Example 1.1 (below) shows a downbeat emphasis (with the staff, bar line and measures also highlighted). Notice that beats 1 *and* 3 are emphasized in each measure of this particular example. (For illustrative purposes, the example uses rests—no notes being played—to show that beats 2 and 4 are not being emphasized.)

Ex. 1.1



Syncopation

Despite the predominance of rock music having a downbeat emphasis, contemporary music genres also contain syncopated rhythms and melodies. *Syncopation* means that there is a strong emphasis on the offbeat (i.e. a beat that is not a downbeat, or a part of a beat that's not normally strongly accented). Listen to the reference audio for this unit (“VP Ref Audio Q-1 Unit-1”) and see if you can identify where syncopation occurs. It might take you a little longer to learn how to sight-read syncopated rhythms because of their offbeat. However, it should be fairly easy for you to learn them by ear. Do this by repeatedly listening to the reference audio.

Example 1.2 below illustrates where the emphasis might occur in a syncopated rhythm. In this example, beats 2 and 4 are accented. (Again we have used rests to show that beats 1 and 2—the downbeats from Example 1.1 above—are not being emphasized.)

Ex. 1.2



Chapter 2: General Performance Notes

Study Materials

In this chapter, we'll discuss general elements of this unit's chart. Make sure that you have both the chart and the accompanying reference audio at hand as you read the "Performance Notes" chapters. Without these items, these chapters will not make sense.

Rehearsal Letters, Song Form Names, and Bar Numbers

To be able to understand and relate the reference audio to the chart, you should look at the chart as much as possible while practicing. Even if you can't read music just yet, doing so will help you to start associating the music and chart.

Rehearsal Letters: Each Vocal Performance chart contains rehearsal letters. Another orchestral device, rehearsal letters are a way for musicians to quickly indicate which specific section of a song they are making reference to, or playing. We will be using alphabetical rehearsal letters, starting with the letter "A" and continuing through the alphabet. The more structurally complex the song, the more rehearsal letters it will require.

Song Form Names: Each chart also contains song form names, such as "verse," "pre-chorus," and "chorus." Much like rehearsal letters, song form names are way of ensuring that the accompanying musicians, your instructor, and you are on the same page during your performances. They have the added benefit of teaching you the form of each song in this course, by proxy of their insertion.

Bar Numbers: As discussed in Chapter 1, bar lines are used to denote a segment of time in a piece of music. Each chart in this course has numbered bar lines at the start of each line of staff (on the far left-hand side). The curriculum often makes reference to specific elements of the chart using bar line number.

Example 1.3 (below) illustrates where rehearsal letters, song form names, and bar lines will be located in the chart, and how they will look. Take a moment to locate these elements in the chart of this unit's song now.

Ex. 1.3

The diagram shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The staff is divided into four measures by vertical bar lines. Above the staff, the following elements are labeled:

- Bar number:** A bracket on the left side of the staff points to the number "10" written below the first measure line.
- Rehearsal letters:** A bracket above the staff spans from the first measure to the third measure. Below the first measure is a box containing the letter "A". Below the third measure is a box containing the letter "B".
- Song form name:** A bracket above the staff spans from the first measure to the second measure. Below the second measure is the word "Intro". A bracket above the staff spans from the third measure to the fourth measure. Below the fourth measure is the word "Verse".

The staff itself contains four measures, each with a single eighth note on the second line of the treble clef.



The Count-Off

Tempo information for each song is contained in each chart (as in Example 1.4 below). However, throughout this course, it is your job to “count off” the song for the band at each of your in-class performances. This means that YOU will count the tempo aloud for the band to hear (and match). To be able to do this, it’s important for you to understand how to count off.

Ex. 1.4

♩ = 120 — Tempo in beats per minute (BPM)

Finding the Quarter-Note Pulse: Before you can count off, you need to find the “beat” of the song. Listen to the reference audio and find the quarter-note pulse. As this unit’s song is in the 4/4 time signature, there are four quarter-note beats to every bar (“one-two-three-four, one-two-three-four”). Count along with this pulse out loud: “one, two, three, four.” Continue counting out loud through a number of measures until you lock into the pulse. This technique will help you to find the beat of the song.

It is important to note that the drum pattern in this unit’s chart does NOT physically play every beat of the quarter-note pulse in the A section. Although the drum pattern is emphasizing offbeat hits (and as such may seem to run across the quarter-note pulse that you are trying to count), the overall time signature is still 4/4. As such, you should be able to lock into the quarter-note pulse and count it aloud. If you are having difficulty, then practice, practice, practice!

Counting Off Out Loud: Once you have found the quarter-note pulse, it’s time to practice counting the song off out loud. It is generally accepted that a count-off spans two measures at the tempo of the song in question, and contains a the words “one, two” (with half-note values in the first measure), followed by a quarter-note “one, two, three, four” in the second measure, as in Example 1.5 below.

Ex. 1.5

Practice counting off repeatedly until you are able to do it freely, loudly (the band has to hear you), and confidently (the audience will hear it too). Once you have mastered this technique you will be counting off songs with ease.

Learning the Melody: Using Scale Degrees

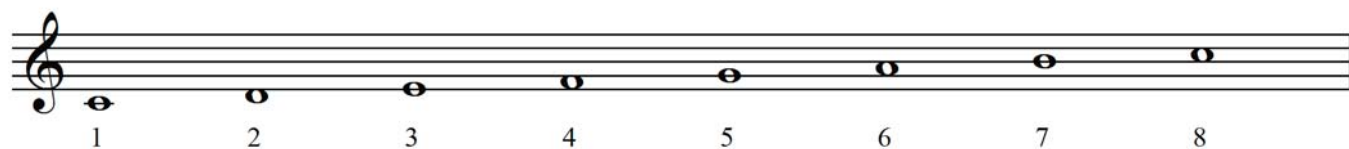
Don't try to dive straight in and sing the melody of this song (or any song, for that matter) immediately. Start by really listening to the melody a number of times *without* singing. By listening intently, your ear becomes attuned to the way in which the melody sounds, its movement, and any recurrent themes.

It is good form for you to practice learning a melody by breaking it down into its scale *degrees*. You can even write these numbers in pencil on the chart for your own reference. Doing so will help you to relate your Sight Singing and Vocal Performance learning more closely—something that will serve to give you a better understanding of both disciplines.

Cross-Course Study Note: Sight Singing 1 introduces the *C major scale* and its associated degrees. With the degree method, each note of the scale is given its own number, or "interval." (Use Example 1.6 below as a reminder of the C major scale.)

Not only is the vocal melody for this unit's song in the key of C major (just like the examples in Unit 1 of your Sight Singing course), the entire melody of the song consists of the first five notes of the C major scale, or 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in scale degrees. As you practice your sight singing and this unit's song, you will come to recognize these notes and this scale. You may wish to play these notes on a piano (in the MI Library or Vocal Labs), in order to familiarize yourself with their sound and location on the keyboard.

Ex. 1.6



Lyrics

Verse

Chorus

Pay close attention to the lyrics of the song. Just like the vocal melody, take time to read through the lyrics once or twice *without* singing them. Next, listen to the reference audio as you read the lyrics. Consider what you think the lyrics might mean in the context of the song. What do you think the writers might have been thinking about when they wrote this song? Understanding the lyrics will help you to tap into the general feel of the song—something that will assist you in giving an authentic performance.

The next step is to give the song some context to you, your life, and your experiences. Read the lyrics again with this in mind, what might they mean to you personally? Is there some experience in your life that you can relate to the words and the images that the lyrics create? It's important to be able to relate to the songs that we perform. Doing so will enable you to communicate the emotion and idea behind the lyrics effectively to the listener.

Chapter 3: Section-Specific Performance Notes



The A Section (Reference audio location: 0:00 – 0:14)

The A section or introduction (denoted by the rehearsal letter “A” on the chart), is eight measures long, as in Example 1.7 below. In this unit’s song, you will notice that each vocal phrase is also eight measures in length—a common length.

Ex. 1.7

Intro Vocals: Although the “Oh_____” vocals in the A section are technically backing vocals (as you can tell from the reference audio), you may choose to sing them as lead vocals if doing so helps you to “lock into” the song. Alternatively, you may choose not to sing, leaving the introduction as an instrumental section, and use those eight bars to find your bearings and off-mic starting note or pitch. For the purposes of this class, either one of these two options is acceptable.

The Quarter-Note Pulse: If you do choose to sing the A section, be sure to lock into your quarter-note pulse before you start to do sing. As previously mentioned, the drum pattern in the A section is syncopated or “off-beat,” but the vocal melody adheres to a more traditional downbeat rhythm. Cross-rhythms such as these have a tendency to throw some vocalists out of time and are thus something that you should be cognizant of before you begin to sing.



The B Section (Reference audio location: 0:14 – 0:43)

Pickup: First evident in the B section (or verse) of the song, the vocal lines actually begin in the bar before the start of the section. This is called a “pickup.” If you were to start singing on the word “*always*” as the band changed to the B section (bar 9), you would have already missed half of the first vocal line of the verse (bar 8). Keeping your internal quarter-note pulse running through the A section (especially in bar 7) will allow you come in at the right place: the start of bar 8. Example 1.8 below illustrates how a pickup might appear in a chart. Notice that the vocal line starts two full measures before the B section.

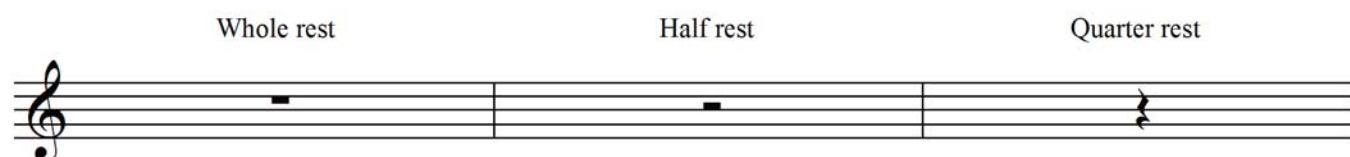
Ex. 1.8

Breathing: The B section is a good place to talk about breathing. As your Vocal Technique curriculum will describe in more detail, it is always important to ensure that you are breathing not only sufficiently, but also in the right places. It is particularly important to ascertain where you should be breathing in this unit's song. Each vocal line is phrased in measures of four (i.e. the vocal lines are four bars long). This puts some distance between viable breathing points.

The first vocal line runs from the pickup at the end of the A section (bar 8), through to the end of the third bar of the B section (bar 11). This means that you need sufficient breath (and breath support—something that you will be discussing in your Vocal Technique classes) to sing through this four-measure vocal line. The only viable place for you to inhale again is at the end of the B section's first four-measure phrase (the end of bar 11/beginning of bar 12).

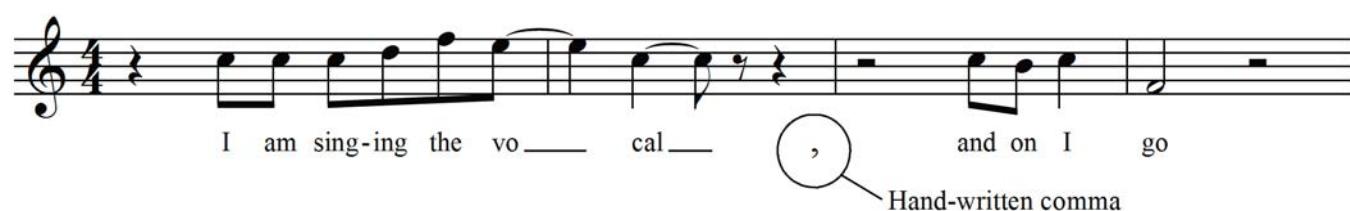
The areas in which you should place your breaths are relatively obvious and logical in the song. There are natural "rests" marked in the vocal melody of the chart at the end of each vocal phrase. Place your breaths in these breaks between singing. Example 1.9 shows the various rests that occur throughout the vocal melody of this unit's chart.

Ex. 1.9



Despite the breaths in this unit's song being fairly straightforward, as a general rule it's good practice to physically mark the places where you will take your breaths on the lyrics of the chart. This is done by using a pencil to insert a comma at each breathing spot. Example 1.10 below illustrates this technique (in which the notes and lyrics have been altered for illustrative purposes).

Ex. 1.10



Syncopation: Although syncopation happens throughout this unit's song, the B section is a good place to discuss this aspect of the vocal melody. Make sure that you understand *where* the syncopation occurs by listening to the reference audio and identifying where the rhythm of the vocal melody strays from the downbeat. To assist you in this task, add eighth notes in between your quarter-note pulse. Do this by continuing to count out "one, two, three, four" for the quarter notes, adding the word "and" on the eighth notes in-between, as in Example 1.11 on the following page.

Ex. 1.11



Using this counting method as you listen to the vocal melody, you should hear that it is syncopated in the following places (although these are not the only examples of syncopation in the song):

- On the word “I’ve” on beat 2 in bar 8 of the A section (the pickup)
- On the syllable “a_” of the word “around” on beat 4 of bar 8 of the A section (pickup)
- On the syllable “_round” of the word “around” on the ‘and’ of beat 4 of bar 8 of the A section (pickup)

It is important to sing these syncopated vocal melody rhythms correctly, not only in terms of *where* they occur in the beats of the bar, but also *how* you sing them. Be sure that you are not anticipating their arrival (or chasing them after the fact). Do not put incorrect accents or undue emphasis on the syncopated notes. The vocal melody should sound fluid and natural, whether adhering to syncopated or downbeat-driven rhythms.



The C Section (Reference audio location: 0:43 – 1:1)

Transitioning to the Upper Register: As with a lot of rock songs, most of this unit’s chart can be sung comfortably in the lower register. However, as the vocal melody ascends into its highest note in the C section (the note “A” on the word “use” in bar 17), most men will have to transition into their upper register in order to sing this note without straining (Example 1.12 below). This is an important shift in not only developing, but also in protecting your voice. Make sure that you DO transition into the upper register at this point in the song. Don’t try to force this note in your lower register.

Ex. 1.12

