

Consonants and Vowels:

Keys to Intonation Success!

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Introduction

- So many of us have been taught to work on vowels as conductors that we forget that most words begin and end with consonants.
- Consonants and vowel usage, or lack thereof, can be one of the root causes of poor intonation.

Intonation

- Use of piano in teaching new compositions, especially a cappella, may cause:
 - Problems due to a tempered instrument being used
 - Grooving of pitch – even the slightest mistakes will affect the pitch later when removing the instrument.
- Seating Arrangements
 - How do you have your singers arranged in your choir?
 - If in sections, are they placed with outer voices on one side and inner on the other side of the risers?
 - Do you have all heavier or darker voices together?
 - What about the brighter voices?
- Tension and Support
 - Monitor our singers
 - Watch for the stopping of breath
 - Many singers are not aware that the higher they sing, the more tense they become
 - Do we see facial tension?
 - Are your singers creating an artificial resonating chamber that will not allow pitches to sing in tune?
- Body Alignment
 - Look for signs in your singers
 - Remember
 - Static Body = static breath = static sound

- Flexible body = flexible breath = flexible sound
 - Some of the most common faults we see:
 - Head and neck tension
 - Tuck and Roll
 - Chicken necks
 - Facial tension
 - Shoulders
- Posture and “Onset”
 - Singers must be able to release abs to take a full relaxed, breath
 - Vocal line is only as good as singers first note
 - Alignment of body when seated and standing
 - Most students lean back too far
 - Hyper-extend knees
 - Sway back
 - To see if good onset is established:
 - Palm in front of mouth
 - Remember that singing and breathing should be one motion
 - Roll a pencil between hands
- Singing as an extension of speech
 - Easiest singing is speech based
 - Best shaper is to color sound in the lips
 - Vowels and pitches – ring in different and changing spaces
- Consonants
 - become aware of what certain consonant sounds do to the average singers

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex
Plosive	p b			t d		ʈ ɖ
Nasal	m	ɱ		n		ɳ
Trill	ʙ			r		
Tap or Flap				ɾ		ɽ
Fricative	ɸ β	f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ
Lateral Fricative				ɬ ɮ		
Approximant		ʋ		ɹ		ɻ
Lateral Approximant				l		ɭ

	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	c ʃ	k g	q ɢ		ʔ
Nasal	ɲ	ŋ	ɴ		
Trill			ʀ		
Tap or Flap					
Fricative	ç ʝ	x ɣ	χ ʁ	ħ ʕ	h ɦ
Lateral Fricative					
Approximant	j	ɥ			
Lateral Approximant	ʎ	ʟ			

- Nasals (m,n, and ng)
 - Solution
 - Add a puff through the nostrils prior to the singing of consonant sounds
- Problematic consonants
 - Stop-plosives and lateral: l,g,k,d,b,t (especially in higher passages)
 - Solutions may include:
 - Substitute with fricative consonants
 - Work to keep consonants as far forward as possible
 - Try to avoid interruption of the breath stream
- Consonants
 - Certain consonants can be pitched – f,v,z,sh,th
 - Some consonants can produce a sub-glottal pitch – b,d,g,k,p,t
 - Teach students to move air through consonants

Conclusion

To ensure great tuning:

- It is imperative that each warm-up concludes with some form of tuning exercise
- Placement of singers within the ensemble and the production of sound
- Use physical gestures and mental imagery to improve sound
- Conductor's understanding of various tuning systems