

Vocal Terms

Soprano:

Alto:

Tenor:

Bass:

Mezzo-soprano

Baritone:

Countertenor:

A Cappella: Singing without any form of instrumental accompaniment.

Bel Canto: Singing that focuses on beautiful sound, not on acting or emotion. It's characterized by ornate vocal style.

Belting: Originally a term applied to female voices only: "This is a loud, driving sound that is produced by pushing the natural chest register beyond its normal limits. Most 'belters' can carry it fairly comfortably up to around B flat in the middle of the staff..." (Oscar Kosarin, *The Singing Actor*) Although the original terminology didn't include men, male singers can also belt.

Blend: when more than one individual is singing, the sound combination between singers, which preferably makes it difficult to pick out one singer's voice amid the group.

Break: The sudden change in tone between the head and chest voice, caused by vocal tension. When a singer hits his or her break, there may be a "popping" sound, or some other sound that is jarring and ugly. This can be avoided with good vocal technique.

Chest Voice: Or "chest register." The lower notes of a singer's range; in the same general range as the speaking voice. When singing in the chest voice, the vocal cords become naturally thick, and the resulting sound is generally associated with deep, warm tones.

Diction: The clear pronunciation of words. This requires attention to both consonants and vowels. Different types of music may require more or less diction; for example, in musical theatre, it's essential that the audience understand the lyrics, but in jazz or blues, the singer may

occasionally slur words on purpose in order to achieve a desired sound. Good diction helps produce good sound, however, so all singers should pay attention to it.

Head Voice: Or "head register." Singing in the higher part of the range. While singing in the head voice, the vocal folds are thin; the head voice is usually associated with light, bright sounds.

Melisma: singing many notes on one syllable

Operetta: A style of theatre in-between opera and musical theatre. Generally, it's a comedy with both music and script. It contains classically-inspired music, sung in a legitimate style.

Parlando Singing: A style where the rhythm--and often the pitch--of the tune are usually observed, but the "singing" sounds more like the speaking voice than the singing voice. Notes are often shortened, and the ends of phrases often have a downward inflection, simulating natural English speech. Rex Harrison was a master of this technique and used it in his role in *My Fair Lady*, among other musicals.

Patter: A "patter song" is one with many lyrics sung rapidly. "Patter" also refers to the brief periods in-between songs where a singer talks to the audience.

Recitative: the "talky" parts of an opera. They sound like speech with accompaniment.

Scat: A jazz term referring to a technique where singers use wordless sounds and improvised notes, often imitating jazz instruments. Frank Sinatra's famous "doo-be-doo-be-do" is an example of scatting.

Scoop: Beginning a note beneath its pitch, then sliding up to the correct pitch. Scooping was the prominent feature of "crooners" in the 1920s-50s; Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, and Perry Como were among the singers famous for this style. Today, scooping should be used infrequently and only to achieve a specific quality or emotion.

Syllabic: singing one note per syllable