

Chorus Chatter

News and Musings for Young at Heart Chorus Members

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Editor: Ray Scroggins

What Do the Notes Mean?



If you don't read notes but are curious about what they stand for, here are the basics. The melody of a song is written in the treble clef, as shown above. It is marked with the sign at the beginning of the line. The bass clef, which uses a different sign, is used mainly for accompaniment in the music we sing, so most of our song sheets don't include it.

If there is more than one line of notes, the melody is usually in the top note of the treble clef. In more complex choral music, the soprano is the higher note, and the alto is the lower note. Tenor and bass parts are the higher and lower notes in the bass clef.

Here are a few of the memory tricks that people use to remember the order of these notes until they learn them. There are a lot of other versions, which you probably can find on Google.

Lines in the Treble Clef:

Every Good Boy Does Fine
Eat Good Bread Dear Father

Spaces in the Treble Clef:

F A C E

Lines in the bass clef:

Good Boys Do Fine Always
Good Bread Dear Father Ate

Spaces in the Bass Clef:

All Cows Eat Grass

Now you know the names of the notes.

In an upcoming issue, we'll take a look at how the shapes of the notes and rest markings tell us how long to hold them.

Button Up Your Overcoat, one of our November songs, was written by Ray Henderson, with lyrics by B.G. DeSylva and Lew Brown. The song was published in 1928 and was first performed later that same year by vocalist Ruth Etting. However, the most famous rendition of this song was recorded early the following year by singer Helen Kane, who was at the peak of her popularity at the time. Kane's childlike voice and Bronx dialect eventually became the inspiration for the voice of cartoon character Betty Boop (who used Kane's famous catchphrase Boop Boop a Doop). Bet you didn't know that!

When the Lights Go on Again, another one of our November songs, was one of many songs that helped keep up the spirits of those who were struggling in the early days of World War II. Written by Bennie Benjamin, Sol Marcus and Eddie Seiler, it expresses hope for an end to the war. Most agree that the lyrics were inspired heavily by the London blackouts, which were imposed to combat the bombing raids by the Germans during 1940 and 1941. The blackouts lasted to the end of the war, and hopeful songs like this one gave people an outlet for their anxiety and fear.

Chorus Chatter

News and Musings for Young at Heart Chorus Members

Pathways to a Free Voice

Roland Wyatt, who died in 2012, was an accomplished vocal coach, best known for his work with the group *Manhattan Transfer*.

Here is a partial list of his Guideposts to Singing:

- No smoking
- No coughing
- NEVER clear the throat
- No yelling or shouting
- No unnatural vocal sounds (animal noises, extreme laughter)
- No loud continuous talking
- No talking in loud places (planes, trains, loud rooms)
- Drink water (1-2 quarts daily)
- No alcohol or caffeine
- Don't inhale fumes (smoke, ammonia, paint thinner)
- No singing while vocally tired
- Avoid singing too high, too long, and with the wrong force
- Get lots of sleep



Overcoming Stage Fright

Thinking of singing a solo or duet on one of our programs but not sure you can handle being alone in front of an audience? That's stage fright, an emotional state that originates in the body's stress response system known as the "fight or flight" response. The brain sends out a signal that

releases hormones, causing the heart to pound, muscles to tense, breathing to quicken and sweat to develop.

Most of these physical responses begin in the brain, but we can work with our bodies and our thoughts to understand how stress responses work and what we need to do to calm down.

Because singing involves so many muscles in the throat, neck, mouth and abdomen, muscle stiffness and tension can cause a host of vocal problems. These can include tones that are too sharp or flat, a tight or weak tone quality, and even the inability to reach a particular note—the dreaded voice "crack."

The good news is there are some simple techniques that can help calm this nervousness, including "box breathing," stretching, repeating a calming word and visualization. In box breathing, you inhale for four beats, hold for four beats, exhale for four beats, hold for four beats and repeat the sequence.

Stretching the back, arms, legs, shoulders and neck while breathing deeply can help set a "rest and digest" system in motion in your brain. The calming word technique is like a mantra meditation. Choose a word that seems peaceful, such as "calm," and simply repeat it over and over in your mind. Visualization works the same way, except you imagine yourself in a calm place and try to make it as vivid as possible in your mind.

Be sure to get a healthy amount of sleep the night before you sing, and also eat a meal that is healthy but not too heavy. Include a banana, as they have calming properties. Don't let a little fear hold you back from experiencing the joy of sharing your voice with the world. Breathe deeply and keep singing for many years to come.


Sharon Paquette Lose in Choral Director Magazine

Chorus Chatter

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Pretty Paper is one of our December songs. It tells the story of a street vendor who sells pencils and paper on the streets during the holiday season. Willie Nelson was inspired to write the song after he remembered a man he often saw when he lived in Fort Worth, Texas. The man had his legs amputated because of a spinal disorder and refused to use a wheelchair. Instead, he chose to move about on rollers as he sold paper and pencils in front of a department store. To attract the attention of customers, he would announce, "Pretty paper! Pretty paper!"

Feliz Navidad is a Christmas song written by Puerto Rican singer and songwriter Jose' Feliciano. It's a *macronic* song, meaning it uses a mixture of languages. The song's simple Spanish chorus is the traditional Christmas/New Year greeting, "Feliz Navidad, prospero año y felicidad," meaning Merry Christmas, a prosperous year and happiness. A simple English verse, "I wanna wish you a Merry Christmas from the bottom of my heart," completes the song, which has become a classic Christmas pop song in the United States, throughout the Spanish-speaking world and internationally.



I Ordered a Chicken
And An Egg From
Amazon.

I'll Let You Know.

Never Too Old to Try Something New

Don't be afraid to try something new when it comes to music. You might be surprised how much it enhances your musical enjoyment. My story is a case in point.

On and off, I tried playing different instruments: accordion from age 9 to 12, piano in my 40s and violin in my early 60s. Nothing took root, due to family and career priorities plus lack of serious dedication. Singing was mainly a hobby, church choir for a few years and then barbershop quartetting starting at age 18. Since my voice changed in eighth grade, I've always been a bass, so I never considered other types of singing.

A new chapter opened up when I gave up on the violin and then recalled a barbershop singing friend who had taken voice lessons in his 60s. I thought, "why not me?" so I found a small conservatory in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, the next town over from my home, and began at age 63. Half-hour weekly lessons continued for about five years after that. Although I had been singing for years, the vocal coaching increased my range, almost eliminated the "break" between high and low (head and chest) voices, improved my breath support and built my confidence to try new singing styles.

If you want to strengthen your voice, improve your vocal range or breath support, learn to read notes or try any other goals in music, there are voice teachers who will work with you at any level, and maybe even some online courses you can take to learn new musical skills. Don't be afraid to give it a try. You might surprise yourself. I know I did!

Ray Scroggins

Why Water?

Hydration isn't just vital when it's hot (or when you're singing). Drink enough every day and your body and brain will benefit too. Water helps keep up a steady flow of nutrients into your cells, which boosts your energy. When you become dehydrated, it affects your physical and mental performance, making you feel sluggish.

Chorus Chatter

News and Musings for Young at Heart Chorus Members

Your brain is hugely dependent on fluid—all its synapses and neurons need liquid to fire properly. Research has shown that some people's memory and attention improve after a drink of water.

You'll kick cold symptoms more easily when you drink enough water. When you're sick, your body has to launch an attack against germs. Your runny nose, for instance, is your body's way of flushing out the pathogens. That means your cells need more fluid. Drinking water also helps loosen mucus and keep your nose and throat moist.

To be sure you get enough water, try refrigerating it. Many people are likely to drink more water if it is cold. Drink a glass before you eat anything. If you get tired of water, try sparkling mineral or flavored water, which has most of the same benefits.

Readers Digest



Get to Know Your Vagus Nerve

Chances are you've never heard of the vagus nerve. It travels from the brain down each side of the neck, through the chest and deep into the gut. It helps regular an astounding number

of the body's essential functions, including breathing, heart rate, blood pressure, perspiration and digestion. Who knew?

The vagus nerve plays a key role in stimulating the *parasympathetic* nervous system. This is your body's "rest and digest" response—a counterbalance to the "fight or flight" mechanisms of the *sympathetic* nervous system.

As singers, there are things we can do to help balance these two systems, which will help us relax after stressful moments and make our bodies better at regulating blood glucose levels and cholesterol. This leads to better health and helps us manage our emotions better as well.

One thing you can practice is deep diaphragmatic breathing. Breathe through your nose, inhale deeply into your belly and exhale slowly. Control your exhale so that it lasts longer than the inhale, like letting the air out of a tire. This exercise improves the functioning of the vagus nerve.

Other things you can do include singing and humming, which produce vibration in the neck that stimulates the vagus nerve in a beneficial way. Also helpful are meditation, if you can, and laughter. Laughter reduces muscle tension in the face, neck and diaphragm that can cause bottlenecks in the vagus nerve signals.

Laughter really is great medicine in many ways.

Bottom Line Personal

Food for thought...wouldn't it be ironic if Popeye's Chicken was fried in Olive Oil?