

What Is Good Tone in Singing?

There would seem to be general agreement on what is a good tone in singing. Acoustical analyses were made of a good singing tone and the following conclusions were reached. According to Bartholomew good tone quality for both male and female voices has the following attributes: 1. A smooth and fairly even vibrato 2. Intensity of tone 3. A low formant for "resonance" or roundness or sonority 4. A high formant for ring or shimmer. The vibrato should be about 6 or 7 times per second in the three variables of pitch, intensity, and timbre. An even vibrato adds to the tone certain warmth or richness to which the listener reacts unconsciously. It is easier on the singer and on the listener as well. The production of good tone is dependent on a relatively large throat, which makes possible greater intensity of tone. The large throat makes possible greater resonance, along with the stronger vibration of the vocal cords. The low formant in male voices centers around 500 cycles or lower. According to Bartholomew "the low formant is produced in the pharynx which in the good tone is considerably enlarged". In the good tone the high formant centers approximately around 2800 cycles. The better the tone or the better the voice, the more prominent this formant becomes. In women's voices the high formant centers at about 3200 cycles, higher than in men's voices, and in some voices, particularly in the coloratura register, there is practically no high formant at all. The so-called head voice register in women's voices is thought to correspond in some respects to the male undeveloped falsetto, which has no high formant. When this happens judgments on quality are based on purity and agility rather than on ring or resonance. If we accept the theory of what constitutes a good tone - vibrato, intensity of tone, and high and low formants - then basically there is one tone that all singers should try to sing. When these attributes are present, the voice is said to be properly placed. One of the problems in placing the voice is to inhibit the swallowing muscles which work to constrict and close the throat, particularly the two pairs known as the pillars or fauces, the palato-pharyngeus and the palato-glossus muscles. Both tend to raise the larynx. This is accomplished by many teachers through the use of imagery, such as keeping the tone forward, singing forward in the masque, singing to the tip of the nose, singing to the teeth, keeping the tone out of the throat. Humming with the teeth slightly apart and the lips relaxed is a device to relax the above mentioned muscles. If the muscles that raise the larynx and tense the tongue are to be relaxed, the problem is to relax the muscles that raise the palate and act as a fulcrum to the muscles below. This can be accomplished through the phonation of the nasals, m, n, and ng. The velum drops because of the relaxation of the levator palatal muscles, thus allowing the breath to pass through the nose. This use of the nasals which inhibits the swallowing muscles has led many teachers and singers to believe that the nose is open and should be kept open during the act of singing. Research studies prove that such is not the case. The palate raises to shut the nasal port - perhaps not completely, but enough to prevent nasality. Part of the open or large throat position is dependent on a raised palate. What in humming has been a form of nasal resonance with the nose open now in good singing becomes an illusion of nasal or head resonance through bone conduction of sound vibration. The nose feels as if it were open. Now you know how good tone is produced, it is time to practice some of the above ways to achieve it.

About the Author

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