

SIGHTSINGING/PITCH TRAINING

The term 'sightsinging' is somewhat of a misnomer because it implies having to sing something entirely new that you have never seen before. As you will soon discover, most melodies are patchworks of familiar motives and patterns that you have already seen and sung before. The only new element is the order in which these patterns occur. When practicing sight-singing, use the following routine:

1. **ANALYZE THE MELODY.** Determine the key and meter. Notice the starting note and the range of the melody (to select what octave you should begin in). Look for patterns--step-wise motion, arpeggiations, repeated notes. Look for potential trouble spots (large leaps, tricky rhythms, rests).
2. **ESTABLISH THE KEY.** Establishing the key means linking the notes on the page (visual) to the appropriate pitches (aural) and solfege syllables (conceptual). Play the tonic pitch, then sing the scale (with syllables). While you are singing, don't go on auto-pilot: look at the music and find the line or space of each pitch you are singing. In particular, memorize the location of DO & SO to use as a visual frame of reference while sightreading.
3. **ESTABLISH THE TEMPO.** Don't just take off from the beginning. Look for the most difficult passage and select your tempo to accommodate this part. This may be the section with the fastest rhythms or it may be a difficult melodic pattern. Once you decide on a tempo, figure out what it is on your metronome (then turn the metronome off).
4. **SING SILENTLY.** Mentally 'sing' the passage while keeping time (e.g. conducting). Afterwards look at the spots that gave you trouble and figure out how correct the problem. This way you can correct some of your mistakes before anyone has heard them.
5. **SIGHTSING** the passage (out loud) while keeping time silently (don't tap). Do not stop or allow yourself false starts or corrections. It is far better to miss one note but keep going (so that the rest of the notes are in time) then to backtrack in order to 'fix' it. Think what would happen if you did this in an ensemble. A late note is wrong whatever pitch you sing.
6. When finished, check the tonic to see if your intonation has drifted and the metronome to see if your tempo has changed. Review and correct any errors you remember. If something didn't work, don't just sing it again and hope that it will get better. Devise a new strategy for your next time through.
7. Try to sing the passage two more times, repeating the above procedures. If you do not think it is correct by then (and almost always you will know), leave it and return to it another day. You are no longer practicing sightsinging, you are now 'preparing' the melody. Similarly, never correct errors by playing the passage on the piano or other instrument. Do this only to check your performance after you think you have the passage correct. This is also no longer sightsinging, it is earsinging (singing by rote). Prepared singing and rote singing are both important skills which should be practiced separately.