Dynamic Plan Guidelines

Look at the **"elevation" of the melody** (mostly lead) to determine the general outline of the dynamic plan. Generally speaking, as the melody ascends, the volume should increase. As the melody descends (especially at and below middle C for leads), the volume should decrease. The same is true of the overall elevation of the chords. The higher and "tighter" the chord, the more likely you are to choose loud.

Chord voicing has a direct impact on the "singability" of the dynamic plan. Overall, it's easier to sing louder on closed rather than open voicing. This, of course, is totally dependent on the "elevation" of each part.

Lyrics will have an impact on dynamic choices after the decisions have been made musically. The classic example of the music and lyrics being at odds with one another (and the music "wins") is the line in "White Cliffs of Dover,"..."baby, don't you cry," where the elevation of the melody (and the voicing) guides the singer to choose a solid crescendo, in spite of the tender lyrics. (In this case, if you wanted the lyrics to "win" and have the ascending vocal line be soft, the difficulty factor for executing that vocal line would at least double…if not triple.)

The **tessitura** of each part constantly has to be factored into the plan.

- low lead: does not support overall loud volumes
- low bass: does not support overall loud volumes
- lots of bari above lead: volume considerations will have to do with two things
    - the elevation of the bari (eg: constant head tone)
    - the elevation of the lead (e.g.: constantly around middle C)
- "divorced" voicing (low lead and bass): does not support overall loud volumes

Groups of chords with lots of **accidentals** are usually sung with better accuracy at something less than loudest volume.

Rather than trying to set the dynamic plan for the entire song as a whole, determine the **musical "subdivisions"** of the song (verse/chorus/bridge, etc.). Each section should have its own low point (soft) and high point (loud). In many songs, you will find that it will be possible to have increasing dynamic contrast in each section of the song with a resulting softest soft and loudest loud in the final section part of the song, which should include the climax. (...how convenient...)

Keep the plan simple (at least at first). Go basic with 3 dynamic levels:

- soft (supported)
- medium
- loud (pretty)
- add transitional dynamics after mastering the basic three

The most overwhelming factor determining the **success of any dynamic plan** is the skill set of the singers.

Other factors that impact dynamic planning:

- melody within the melody
- "walking" vocal lines (commonly found in contrary motion chord progressions: overtly in embellishment or "hidden" in chord progressions)
- embellishments
    - overt
    - hidden

Finally, there is the **singer's perspective** to consider in creating the dynamic plan. For example, a bass singing a mid-volume on the D above middle C will have to sing a loud-volume on the D an octave below that to maintain the listener's perception of the "same" volume.

This "carrying power" of higher notes over lower notes…overall and within the range of each voice part…is also why leads have to sing louder (and have trouble balancing) around and below middle C.

Another example of this situation (going the other direction) is any singer having to make a large ascending jump in their vocal line. Without finessing the approach to volume, the higher note will pop out of the vocal line.

The overlying difficulty factor in all this is that **the vocal line always needs to stay energized** as the singer moves through all these situations in her vocal line. One of the most difficult of these is executing an energized decrescendo.

Our job is to first determine the dynamics supported by both the music and the lyrics and then to interpret that from the singer's perspective…always with the listener in mind.

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