

Singing Smart Lead

All four parts singing in the BBS style are required to master a number of skills in common. Among those skills are:

- accuracy
- synchronization...which would include
 - well-defined rhythms
 - complete understanding of the phrasing and its internal rhythms
 - rhythmic breathing
- balance and coning
- the ability to create and maintain overtone quality (ring) in the sound
- resonance appropriate to the ensemble sound, including
 - the ability to manage a register break without disturbing the horizontal flow of the vocal line
 - the ability to smoothly execute the vocal color plan (textures)
 - well-formed and matched word sounds

So, now what? After all, it's just the melody, isn't it?

Any singer who approaches the fine art of lead singing with the above attitude will surely be destined to fail. The lead part is *so much more* than singing the melody.

There's no better way to describe the lead's job than to quote the JCDB:

“The lead voice generally carries the melody, so she must sing with **musical authority**. The *ideal* lead voice has **clarity, brilliance, depth, maturity** and a **sense of style** that sets her voice apart from the other three. She sings with a sufficient amount of **color** to add interest to the tone but never so much as to distort the locked chord characteristic of the barbershop style...While much of her vocal authority comes from utilizing the lower chest register, she must be able to execute a **smooth transition between the lower and the upper registers** so that quality remains consistent between the extremes of her range. The lead voice should also be capable of a **wide range of expressive dynamics**.”

The skillful lead must remember that:

- she is predominant in the sound of the ensemble because of her voice quality, not because of the volume she uses
- consistency is necessary for all singers, but crucial for the lead singer for everything from ensemble synchronization to tuning to breath timing
- she is just as responsible for tuning as the harmony parts...however, the lead's concern is primarily the maintenance of the tonal center
- she actively participates in singing in balance and coning
- she does not "actively" blend with others, but rather, produces a sound with which the harmony parts can blend
- while she doesn't have to match the vowels of the other singers, she **MUST** produce a vowel sound that is true to the word being sung; this vowel, then, must be fully resonated
- she must be just as skillful in the art of harmony singing since she doesn't always have the melody, even in a contest song

The demands of lead singing are numerous and challenging. Yet there is nothing more thrilling than the sound of a ringing, freely produced melody.

Now who was that again that said singing lead was easy because it was *JUST* the melody?!?!?!?