

**Summer Sacred Music Institute 2018**  
**of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America**

**VOCAL TECHNIQUE 1: BREATHING TO SING**

**Presenter: Valerie Yova**

Please watch the following videos prior to the class:

Appoggio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDrhkt8KIA4>

Diaphragm: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hp-gCvW8PRY>

Mechanics of breathing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1QyU9hyHRM>

**I. Breath is the fuel or power source for your voice.**

There are many common terms used by singers and voice teachers to describe and teach breathing: air flow, appoggio, breath control, breath support, breath management, and singing on the breath.

Your goal is to provide the air supply needed to create optimal phonation for singing. Breath allows the vocal folds to vibrate and creates and maintains your singing sound.

Breathing is how you take in air.

Support/balance is what you do with that air once it is in your body.

Breathing for singing (inhalation or how you take in air) is different than breathing for speech.

**II. BREATHING TO SPEAK:**

- Breathing is unconscious. You don't usually remind yourself to breathe in every day speech.
- You inhale small amounts of air into the upper part of the lungs.
- The smaller amount of air you breathe results in clavicular breathing (high breathing) which works just fine for speech.
- The exhale is not controlled. We take lots of breaths in every day speech.

**III. BREATHING TO SING:**

- Breathing becomes a conscious act. When you start to sing, you think about your breathing.
- You inhale more air but not to the point of tension.
- Because you inhale more air, your lungs are fuller. The fullness creates an expansion in your ribs, abdomen and back.
- The exhale is controlled. What this means is that the expansion created in your body doesn't collapse when you begin singing. Like a slow hiss, (or leaky tire) the air is released slowly and evenly. This resistance to collapse is often referred to as "SUPPORT." The muscles you used to inhale are staying open, engaged, activated during the exhale to "support" the tone with a smooth stream of air. The muscles that expanded on the inhalation "lean" out against each other as you exhale. ("appoggiare" = to support, lean, rest)

**Source: [https://www.nats.org/Music\\_Theater\\_-\\_Resources.html](https://www.nats.org/Music_Theater_-_Resources.html)**

#### **IV. BREATHING TO SING - EXERCISES**

1. The effect of posture on breath
2. Finding the muscles that we need to engage for the singer's breath
3. Why do some teachers say "Breathe from your diaphragm!" What do they mean?
4. What does "appoggio" actually mean, relative to singing?

#### **V. Richard Miller Appoggio Exercise**

This exercise is best done lying down because you can concentrate on the expansion of your ribs and abdominal muscles without being concerned about keeping the chest lifted and keeping the shoulders relaxed.

Put a rolled towel under your neck, or a book under the occipital bone (protrusion) on the back of your head to support the weight of the head.

Keep your knees bent, and feel the lower back and shoulders sink into the floor.

The exercise repeats 6 times, and each repetition has 3 STEPS.

1. As you inhale, feel the 3 different sets of muscles around the middle of your body and the muscles between your ribs expand very slowly.
2. Suspend the breath for 5 counts as if you are about to sneeze. Concentrate on staying expanded and energized without getting tense. Do not think about "HOLDING" your breath, but more about SUSPENDING it.
3. As you exhale, control the very slow release of the abdominal and intercostal (rib) muscles.

1

2

3

Inhale for 4 beats – Suspend for 5 beats – Exhale for 4 beats

Inhale for 5 beats – Suspend for 5 beats – Exhale for 5 beats

Inhale for 6 beats – Suspend for 5 beats – Exhale for 6 beats

Inhale for 7 beats – Suspend for 5 beats – Exhale for 7 beats

Inhale for 8 beats – Suspend for 5 beats – Exhale for 8 beats

Inhale for 9 beats – Suspend for 5 beats – Exhale for 9 beats

#### **VI. VOCAL WARM-UP**

#### **VII. APPLYING THE SINGER'S BREATH TO OUR REPERTOIRE**

**Summer Sacred Music Institute 2018**  
of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America

**VOCAL TECHNIQUE 2: BLEND & BALANCE IN ENSEMBLE SINGING**

**Presenter: Valerie Yova**

**Please watch this video before class:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdEcXX5GCsc>

Robert Shaw said that an ensemble will have a balanced ensemble sound if everyone sings:

- The right pitch
  - and the right vowel
    - at the right dynamic level
      - at the right time!

**Blending** in a choir is key to getting a unified sound. It's all very well when individuals can sing confidently, but if certain voices are sticking out, it's not a choir anymore – it's just a group of soloists!

Achieving choral blend and balance requires:

- A high level of concentration and commitment from both singer and director
- The ability to listen to those around us
- The director's ability to HEAR what is really happening (This is why it is ideal for the conductor to NOT be singing, or to sing as little as possible.)

## **Choral Balance -vs- Choral Blend**

Obviously, a factor that can affect our blend is balance. By "balance" here we mean the relative volume of each part. Depending on the piece of music, the volume of each part shouldn't necessarily be the same. It means every part has an appropriate volume. For now, let's think of choral balance as being something that occurs primarily between voice sections, e.g., balance between the sopranos and basses.

Choral blend must be achieved within each section and within the over all choir in order to establish a unified sound.

## **Unified Pitch**

- Match the voice with the ear to establish a true pitch (listen)
- A flat or sharp pitch is a WRONG pitch
- Singing intervals accurately, giving careful attention to ascending and descending half-step intervals
- Understand and hear dissonance as well as consonance
- Vibrato problems are almost always pitch problems

- Individuals and sections can ruin a piece by over singing and “shouting” as they get caught up in the piece.
- Listening to those around you and adjusting your pitch, tone and volume are all important

## Unified Vowels and Consonants

- Sing the same vowel and consonant at the same time. Doing this will make the words more understandable and convey the emotions of the song
- When singing softly, vowels are soft – consonants are never soft
- 99 percent of singing should be on a vowel
- Vowels are spacious, high and forward
- Understand and develop the male head voice

## Unified Dynamics/Balance

- Sing at a similar dynamic level, crescendo or diminuendo for a perfect balance and ensemble
- The singer must have a real desire to truly have his or her voice become part of the choral sound (forgoing solo technique)

## Unified Rhythm

Often overlooked, but the voice that sticks out is often late or (less often) early as well as too loud and wide. If that voice arrives on time, it sticks out much less.

- Sing together at the same time
- Late or early notes are WRONG notes
- Don't change tempo with dynamic changes (unless marked)
- Measured sound and measured silence are equal
- Recognize the smallest unit of the beat to develop a sense of inner pulse
- Staccato singing is a good rehearsal technique to sharpen rhythm and pitch

**Blend starts with listening; you can't blend if you don't know what to listen for.**

**Blend is about noticing something that needs correcting, and then making that correction.**

Sources:

<http://www.grace4all.com/how-to-achieve-a-better-choral-blend/>

[https://music.stackexchange.com/questions/40001/voice-parts-exercises-for-](https://music.stackexchange.com/questions/40001/voice-parts-exercises-for-blending?utm_medium=organic&utm_source=google_rich_qa&utm_campaign=google_rich_qa)

[blending?utm\\_medium=organic&utm\\_source=google\\_rich\\_qa&utm\\_campaign=google\\_rich\\_qa](https://music.stackexchange.com/questions/40001/voice-parts-exercises-for-blending?utm_medium=organic&utm_source=google_rich_qa&utm_campaign=google_rich_qa)

<https://www.musical-u.com/learn/how-to-achieve-excellent-tone-balance-and-blend-in-your-choir/>

<http://robertshaw.website/philosophy-on-blend/>



- Relationship building with fellow singers
- Communication skills
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. List one realistic goal you can strive towards in strengthening the area of highest priority in question 4.

Goal: \_\_\_\_\_

Practical steps to take that will lead to achieving that goal :

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

6. What kind of resources would help you to move towards this goal? (financial and human)

7. What 5 areas do you think your choir or chant group most needs to strengthen in the coming year? Number them 1 through 5, with 1 being the area of highest priority.

- Vocal sound (quality of the sound, breath control)
- Vocal blend/balance
- Musicianship/music theory/sight-reading
- Focus/attentiveness
- Attendance
- Promptness
- Communication among the musicians (about schedule, goals, etc.)
- Communication and rapport with the clergy
- Knowledge of services
- Piety/humility
- Being less distracting to the rest of the parish
- Recruitment and training of new singers
- More engagement/participation of the “congregation”
- Children and/or teens more involved in the music ministry
- Musical repertoire (need new music, need easier or more challenging music)
- Music books/binders (music needs to be easier to see, type-set, cleaned up, etc.)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

8. List one realistic goal that your choir or chant group can strive towards in the coming year that will strengthen the area of highest priority in question 7.

Goal: \_\_\_\_\_

Practical steps to take that will lead to achieving that goal :

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

9. What resources would help your group to move towards this goal? (financial and human)

## **SAMPLE GOALS**

### **St. Athanasius Parish – Santa Barbara**

#### **GOALS FOR SPRING/SUMMER 2010**

1. Begin once-a-month choral Vespers
2. New Liturgy music binders for the choir
3. Edit, revise, refresh all weekly service booklets.
4. Begin working on service booklets for Holy Week with complete text.
5. Planning meeting to discuss possible musical fundraiser for Building Fund.
6. Move choir to front for summer - trial period to create better synergy between choir, clergy, congregation.

#### **GOALS JULY-DECEMBER 2011**

1. Form task force of parents to support formation of children's music program, and Teen Choir.
2. Continue to meet privately with each member of adult choir to assess skills and provide some one-on-one instruction.
3. Conduct a vocal workshop just for the clergy.
4. Recruit 2 basses and 1 alto for Adult Choir
5. Offer series of classes on basic music theory & sight-singing June/July 2011.
6. Expand the pool of singers available and trained to sing Matins on Sunday mornings.
7. Fall 2011 – Choir to participate in Icon Festival

#### **GOALS FOR SEPTEMBER 2016-AUGUST 2017:**

1. Produce a professionally recorded CD of our choir.
2. Choir to perform in concert at 4th Liturgical Arts Festival (Nov. 11-13, 2016)
3. More participation of children in singing Liturgy.
4. Music learning sessions with the whole parish to encourage and nurture more singing by the congregation.
5. Continue to work on the sound system in the nave of the church.
6. Recruit one new singer in each section. (soprano, alto, tenor, bass)
7. Train 2 more assistant directors.





# The Choral Experience: Classifying Your Voice

Paul Jabara

SMI 2018

## Vocal Range Chart



The role of vocal range in classifying different singing voices to voice types is considered so important. However, there are times when these 2 terms are being confused with each other. The term “voice type” refers to a specific type of singing voice that has identifying characteristics or qualities.

Vocal range is considered only one of those qualities. There are many other factors included such as vocal weight, vocal registration, scientific testing, speech level, physical characteristics, vocal transition, vocal timbre and vocal tessitura. A combination of all these factors is utilized to determine a singer’s voice, and categorize it into a specific type of voice type.

## Types of Vocal Range

The voices of women are divided into 3 categories: soprano, contralto and mezzo-soprano. In the case of men, their voices are typically categorized into 4 groups: tenor, countertenor, bass and baritone. When it comes to the pre-pubescent children’s voices, treble and 8th term is usually applied.

In each of these main categories, several sub-categories are present that serve to identify particular voice qualities such as vocal weight and coloratura facility to differentiate various types of voices. The irony is that the vocal range itself has no ability to identify the voice type of a singer.

Each voice type is known to possess a general voice range that is associated with it. Singing voices may cover vocal ranges that have only 1 voice type, or they fall between the common ranges of 2 voice types. In this case, voice teachers use only vocal range as a factor in categorizing a singer’s voice.

## The Tessitura Voice Within Your Range

Tessitura refers to where your voice is comfortable when singing. It is considered more important than vocal range in determining the voice classification. Another more important factor is vocal timbre, described as the descriptive sound of your singing voice. As an example, a woman can have a type of vocal range that can reach the high pitch of a mezzo-soprano.

Accordingly, she can also sing the low notes of a soprano. Therefore, a voice teacher would try to determine if a singer is more comfortable in singing higher or lower notes. Let's say that you are more comfortable to sing higher notes, then, your teacher may classify you as a soprano.

On the other hand, if you were more comfortable in singing lower notes, then, you would probably be classified as a mezzo-soprano. However, a voice teacher would not put a singer into a classification of more than 1 voice type, regardless of his/her size of vocal range.

Tessitura, in music, is defined as the range within which a voice, or a musical instrument sounds best. It is the most comfortable range in which a voice produces its top quality. As a singer, it is crucial to find your tessitura so that you can sing well without much strain.

Tessitura is a better determinant of voice type because range alone will not show where a voice sounds best. Therefore, for you to correctly make out your voice type, you will have to focus on vocal tessitura and timbre.

In a vocal range test, you have to go beyond knowing your highest and lowest notes. Because vocal notes are subject to alteration, finding your comfortable singing range (Tessitura) is more important than knowing your lowest & highest notes you can hit. As a singer, you might learn a role, but when you sing it, you can't bring out the best voice in that song, because the basic tessitura of that role does not suit you at all.

Once you have identified your vocal range, you can find your Tessitura by singing different songs that are within your vocal range and identify the song that you can sing better easily. Study the vocal range and notes of that song; I'm sure you will find more specific minor vocal ranges and notes that constitute your Tessitura voice.

The volume in which you can sustain quality is an important determinant of the tessitura that you will choose. Once you know your tessitura well, it is easy to sing the highest quality because you will choose what suits your "fach" (voice type) and range (tessitura).

Every song has its defining parts that stand out. You can make an impressive performance if you can bring out this parts so well and knowledge of Tessitura comes in handy here. If you want to sing at your best, give yourself the freedom of tweaking the keys of the most important parts of a song such as bridges and choruses so that they match with your tessitura (the strongest part of your singing voice). The performance is more meaningful if the singer puts emphasis on the defining parts of a song, so you have to make sure that these parts are sung within a range that is most comfortable and powerful for you.

## Orthros

Orthros, also called Matins, is the longest and most complex of the daily cycle services. Unless it is celebrated as a vigil in the evening, orthros (Greek for "early dawn" or "daybreak") is celebrated in the morning. While some sections of Orthros follow the eight tone cycle, others follow the eleven part cycle of the Resurrectional Gospels.

\* Sunday Orthros opens with the priest's exclamation Blessed is our God ..., Heavenly King ..., and the Trisagion Prayers. (Note: Heavenly King ... is omitted between Pascha and Pentecost.)

- The reader reads the Royal Troparia (O Lord save thy people... Glory. Do Thou, Who of Thine... Both now. O Champion dread...).
- A brief litany (Have mercy on us, O God...).
- The six psalms (3, 37, 62, 87, 102, and 142 Septuagint numbering) are read.
- The Great Litany of Peace.
- "God is the Lord..." and the appropriate apolytikia are chanted.
- The small litany.
- The kathismata (read or chanted).
- The Evlogetaria (Blessed art Thou O Lord, teach me thy statues) are chanted.
- The small litany is offered again.
- The Hypakoe is read.
- The Anavathmoi (hymns of ascent) are read or chanted.
- The Prokeimenon is chanted.
- The order of the Gospel is followed: the deacon intones Let us pray to the Lord ..., the priest responds with an exclamation, and the choir chants three times, "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord." One of eleven Gospels is read; these Gospels, are an eleven-week cycle of readings taken from the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection appearances of Jesus. Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ ... is usually read by the elder.
  - The 50th Psalm is read/chanted.
  - Glory..., both..., Have mercy on me... and their troparia are chanted.
  - The deacon intones, O God, save thy people and bless thy inheritance ...
  - 12x "Lord have mercy".
  - Kontakion, Oikos, and Synexarion are read.
  - The Katavasia are chanted. (They vary depending on the celebrated season)
  - The choir chants the Magnificat while the deacon/priest censes the church.
  - The ninth ode of the katavasia is chanted.
  - The Small Litany is intoned.
  - The choir chants "Holy is the Lord our God" x3 (Pascha till Pentecost) "Exalt ye the Lord..." (the rest of the year).
  - The Exapostilaria (hymns related to the Orthros Gospel) are chanted.
  - The Lauds (Praises) are chanted
  - Glory. Doxastikon
  - Both now. "Most blessed art thou..."
  - The Great Doxology is chanted.
  - "Today has salvation..." or "Having risen from the tomb..."

### *Nine forms of Orthros:*

#### Basic Forms:

1. Sunday Orthros: the longest. If this service is celebrated in its entirety it can last up to three hours. (Psalms read between the Kathismata, Polielia, Canons and all verses of the Praises chanted, the remaining ektanias and the dismissal)
2. Daily Orthros on Saturday
3. Daily Orthros: there is no Gospel.
4. Feast day Orthros with Gospel.
5. Feast day Orthros without Gospel

#### Special Forms:

6. Lenten Orthros: penitential material added. (Hymns for the Trinity and for the Light)

#### Orthros services related to Holy Week and Pascha:

7. Great and Holy Friday Orthros: there are twelve Gospel lessons; Antiphons are used. The 15th antiphon: Today is hung on a tree...
8. Great and Holy Saturday Orthros. This contains some elements of the old cathedral office: procession with epitaphios, reading of three pericopes (OT, epistle, Gospel) at the end.
9. Paschal Orthros. This is celebrated from Pascha Sunday until Thomas Sunday. The six psalms and the praises are omitted.

## The Office of Vespers

The Office of Vespers is the Church's evening worship that starts the celebration of the liturgical day which begins at sundown in the Orthodox Christian tradition. Therefore, Vespers is actually the first service of the day, inaugurating a great feast of Jesus Christ or the Theotokos, the commemoration of a saint or an event in the history of the Church. For example, we begin the weekly celebration of Christ's Resurrection each Saturday night and continue it through Sunday morning.

Here is the general structure of **Great Vespers**. Note that psalm numbers follow the Septuagint.

\* Vespers opens with the priest's exclamation "Blessed is our God." In full practice, the Trisagion Prayers and the priest's exclamation follow, unless the Ninth Hour service immediately precedes Vespers. (Ninth Hour would have started with the Trisagion Prayers and exclamation.) Otherwise, the reader says "Come, let us worship..." and then the "Proemial" Psalm 103, that is, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; O Lord my God, Thou hast been magnified exceedingly..."

\* The priest, or deacon if present, offers the Great Litany that concludes with the priest's exclamation "For unto Thee are due all glory, honor and worship..."

\* A grouping of psalms, called a "kathisma," is read in full practice. On Saturday nights, we read the first "kathisma" which is Psalms 1-8. (It is best to follow a liturgical Psalter, like one produced by Holy Transfiguration Monastery of Brookline, Mass. for greater ease in reading.) In parish practice, we can sing select verses of Psalms 1-8 ("Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.")

\* Psalms 140 ("O Lord, I have cried unto Thee"), 141, 129, and 116 are chanted in the tone of the first hymn that is inserted in between the psalm verses.

On Saturday nights, starting with the last two verses of Psalm 141 ("Bring my soul out of prison" and "The righteous shall wait for me"), hymns about Christ's Resurrection are inserted. On great feasts, hymns usually begin within Psalm 129 ("Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord").

After Psalm 116, we sing doxastica and/or theotokia. On a Saturday night, the Doxasticon usually pertains to the commemoration of the day from the Menaion, Triodion or Pentecostarion, and the Theotokion pertains to the Theotokos in the tone of the week from the Octoechos.

\* The hymn "O Gladsome Light" is sung, followed by the day's evening prokeimenon.

\* On the occasion of great feasts and important saints, we have three readings from the Old Testament. In the case of apostles, we have three readings from the New Testament.

\* The priest, or deacon if present, offers the Litany of Fervent Supplication that concludes with the priest's exclamation "For Thou art a merciful God and lovest mankind..."

\* The prayer "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this evening without sin" is read, traditionally by one reader, but in unison with all congregants in parishes.

\* The priest, or deacon if present, offers the Litany of Supplication that concludes with the priest's exclamation "For Thou art a good God and lovest mankind..."

\* The priest then gives "The Peace," the "Prayer of the Bowing of Heads" and his exclamation "Blessed and glorified be the might of Thy kingdom..."

\* On the occasion of great feasts and important saints, a "Liti" service can be offered at this point in Great Vespers. The clergy process to the place in the church where the festal icon stands. After the chanters finish their hymns during the procession, the priest, or deacon if present, will recite a long litany while the chanters offer triplets of "Lord, have mercy." (One petition requires a fortyfold "Lord, have mercy.")

The priest then reads a long intercessory prayer and concludes it with his exclamation. He leads the chanting of "Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, full of grace." After this, in the service of "Artoklasia," the priest blesses five loaves of bread, plus wheat, wine and oil that are placed next to the festal icon. The bread is broken and the chanters recite "Rich men have turned poor." The bread is distributed to the faithful at the conclusion of Great Vespers.

\* Next, the Aposticha are chanted. The Greek word literally means "hymns on the (psalm) verses." Aposticha are unique in that they start with a hymn rather than a psalm verse, compared to "O Lord, I have cried unto Thee" and the Praises in Orthros. These are more hymns that honor the day's commemoration. They conclude with a Doxasticon and/or a Theotokion like at "O Lord, I have cried unto Thee."

\* The Prayer of St. Simeon the God-receiver ("Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace") is read by the elder in the Byzantine tradition and sung in the Slavic tradition. The Trisagion Prayers and the priest's exclamation follow.

\* The apolytikia of the day are then chanted. These are considered the main hymns of the day or feast in that they precede the "apolytisis," Greek for "dismissal." Therefore, "apolytikia" are "dismissal hymns," whereas "troparia" simply means "hymns" in the ordinary sense.

\* Usually, a Theotokion follows the apolytikia in the tone of the last apolytikion of the day. On great feasts, and during their forefeasts and after-feasts, we finish with their apolytikia and omit a Theotokion.

\* The priest then gives the Dismissal.

In **Daily Vespers**, note the following differences in order:

\* The hymn "O Gladsome Light" is read, not sung, by the Protopsaltis (head chanter).

\* The Litany of Fervent Supplication is moved in between the apolytikia and the dismissal, omitting the petitions "Let us say with our whole soul" and "O Lord Almighty, the God of our Fathers" and starting with "Have mercy upon us, O God."

\* The Prayer of St. Simeon the God-receiver ("Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace") is read by the elder and never sung.