

# What Works Workshop

(A Project of Oregon Music Educators Association and the Oregon Department of Education)

## COMMON VOCAL PROBLEMS

and

## THEIR REMEDIES

(OR "THERE IS NO QUICK FIX")

### THE PROBLEMS

- I. PITCH AND INTONATION
  - ...Can't consistently match pitch
  - ...Scooping
- II. TONE AND BREATH
  - ...Breathy Tone
  - ...Nasal Tone
  - ...Not "Singing Out"
  - ...Running Out of Breath
- III. REGISTERS
  - ...Limited Range
  - ...Singing Flat
  - ...Singing sharp
  - ..."Belting," the "Annie" Syndrome  
(Pushing the lower or chest voice into the head)
- IV. DISTORTED DICTION
- V. MOTIVATION, Boys especially

### THE CLINICIANS

Carol Ann Armstrong  
Exine Bailey  
Pam Bridgehouse  
Gary Frame  
Arva Frank  
Jeanne C. Frolick  
Charles Graber  
Laurie Guttormsen  
Bobbie R. Holsberry  
Roberta Jackson  
Melinda Jordan  
Kirk Kassner  
Karen Knutson  
William Mayclin  
Carol Nelson  
Susan St. John  
and  
Doris Sjolund

### Special Focuses

"Some Ways to Develop Beautiful Singing in the Classroom," Arva Frank  
"The Use of Warm-Up Exercises," Bobbie R. Holsberry  
"Visual Imagery," Melinda Jordan  
"Breathing," William Mayclin  
"Return to the Basics," Dr. Susan St. John  
"Tried and True," a choral listing, Doris Sjolund

and

Vocal Resources, with recommended materials from Exine Bailey, Kathryn Olson and Doris Sjolund

### The Problem and Who Addressed It:

...Can't Consistently Match Pitch—E,G,J,C,L,R,K,Kar,Car  
...Scooping—E,G,L,R,K,Kar,Car  
...Breathy Tone—E,L,B,R,Kar  
...Nasal Tone—E,L,Kar  
...Not "Singing Out"—E,A,C,L,B,M,Kar,Car  
...Running Out of Breath—E,C,K,Kar,Car  
...Limited Range—CA,E,P,A,L,R,K,Kar,Car  
...Singing Flat—C,L,K,Kar,Car  
...Singing Sharp—C,L,K,Kar,Car  
..."Belting"—E,L,R,Kar  
...Distorted Diction—E,Kar  
...Motivation—E,L,K,Kar  
...Responsibility to Singers—E,S

### Key

Carol Ann Armstrong (CA)  
Exine Bailey (E)  
Pam Bridgehouse (P)  
Gary Frame (G)  
Arva Frank (A)  
Jeanne C. Frolick (J)  
Charles Graber (C)  
Laurie Guttormsen (L)  
Bobbie R. Holsberry (B)  
Roberta Jackson (R)  
Melinda Jordan (M)  
Kirk Kassner (K)  
Karen Knutson (Kar)  
Carol Nelson (Car)  
Susan St. John (S)



**Kirk Kassner** - - General Music, Choir, Band, Orchestra; Gray Middle School, Portland

**THE PROBLEM:** Many technical vocal problems can be easily and quickly corrected using music technology.

The best vocal training technology readily available at this time is the *Pitch Master*.\* The well-sequenced series of lessons takes novice singers through taped interactive singing experiences in which they are given specific immediate feedback on how well they read music, match pitch, avoid scooping, and sing in tune (the program has three accuracy settings: easy, medium, hard). Students' ranges are slowly expanded and music examples are gradually lengthened with instruction on proper breathing and breath support to increase phrase length and tone support.

All my vocal students cycle through the lessons two at a time. Some students move very quickly and others must repeat the exercises several times to learn enough vocal control to get the minimum passing score. All students benefit from the lessons, but those with the most vocal problems show the greatest increase in ability. It is a wonderful, almost magical, tool for correcting common problems with a minimum of time and effort. Teachers can also make their own tapes for the *Pitch Master* to help students learn the repertoire faster, especially those difficult passages, which require many repetitions to achieve mastery. As with most computer programs, the *Pitch Master* is very patient, provides immediate personal feedback, and helps students without embarrassing them by calling attention to their problems in front of others. This is especially important for boys whose voices are temporarily out of control while going through the change.

Another useful technological tool is the *Vocalizer 1000*\*\*

This is a very new sampling and MIDI control device. Students sing into its microphone and the *Vocalizer 1000* transforms the sound into digital data, which can be used to control any MIDI device. If it is connected to an IBM computer equipped with the IBM Music Feature Card and the Music Printer Plus program, that which students sing is printed in standard music notation onto the screen and/or printer paper. This can be a very effective tool for helping students learn to sing both in tune and rhythmically correctly. Since it is so new, no sequences of lessons have been developed for it, but innovative vocal teachers would quickly learn ways to exploit its potential.

Finally, vocal teachers need to keep in mind the many good computer software programs which help develop student inner hearing and general musicianship. The *DoReMi*\* program is excellent for increasing student ability to audiate within the diatonic system and the program is so fun they love to play it over and over. *Sebastian II*\* is a great program for error detection of common vocal problems: poor intonation, wrong pitches and wrong rhythms. *Note Blaster*\* is an inexpensive and fun way to learn pitch names in the treble and bass staves and is easily modified to help the slowest beginner and the most advanced singer. *Arnold*\*, *Melodious Dictator*\* and *Harmonious Dictator*\* are excellent ear-training programs for your very advanced students—especially those looking toward a career in music.

For further reading, write for an information-packed book, *Integrating Technology into the K-12 Classroom*, available free-of-charge while limited supplies last from Superintendent of Public Instruction, Attn: Dennis Small, Old Capital Building, FG-11, Olympia, WA 98504.

\*Available from Temporal Acuity Products, 300 120th Ave NE, Bellevue, WA 98005. (206)462-1007

\*\*Available from Breakaway Systems, address not available: ask your local music instrument dealer.