

**How to Be a Great Tenor**

**Barbershop Harmony Australia  
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CROSSROADS QUARTET

## I. The Role of the Tenor in Barbershop Music

Greg Lyne's car illustration:

- ]/ Basses are the engine, providing a constant supply of smooth power.
- ]/ Baritones are the transmission, effortlessly shifting gears.
- ]/ Leads are the drivers.
- ]/ Tenors are...the paint! Brilliant colors.

Kevin Keller's analysis:

- ]/ Basses are the leads.
- ]/ Leads are the personality, telling the story.
- ]/ Baritones are the counter or anti melody, never winning and never losing.
- ]/ Tenors are the articulators, providing sparkling diction.

What is the role of the tenor? To provide brilliant sparkle to the ensemble sound. Hindrances to this

role:

- ]/ Poor tone choice, singing with a covered, breathy, damp sound. This is often caused by losing good breath support in an effort to sing softly. Solution: never sing softly! "Sing lower levels of loud" (Dr. Jim Henry).
- ]/ "Mush mouth singing," giving no attention to consonants, which once again dampens the sound. Solution: articulate, energizing singable consonants and transposing non-singable consonants.

## II. The Role of the Tenor in Balancing and Tuning Chords

To properly tune and balance chords, you must understand the music chord by chord (vertically) as well as note by note (horizontally).

Rules of tuning:

- ]/ Root-fifth is a perfect interval (just like on a piano).
- ]/ Thirds slightly settled ("just high enough to be just low enough to be in tune" – Joe Liles).
- ]/ Sevenths are settled even more so than thirds.
- ]/ Sometimes the note on paper is the same from one chord to the next, but the function changes from one chord to the next.
- ]/ The late Jim Miller always said that there are no half-steps in barbershop, only 3/8 and 5/8 steps. This is especially true for tenors.

Rules of balance:

- ]/ Root-fifth predominant, thirds and sevenths balance to them.
- ]/ Upper octave balances to lower octave.

Since in any given chord tenors are usually on a third, a seventh, or sometimes an octave, tenors must balance to the rest of the ensemble. But there are times when the tenor has a chance to shine:

- | In what is often called a “Chinese seventh” the tenor is on the root, and the ensemble balances to the tenor.
- | Some chords (6 chords, 9 chords, diminished chords, etc) require equal balance between all four parts.
- | In lead-tenor duets, the balance between the two parts should be more equal.
- | And of course, every now and then all is right with the world and the tenor gets the melody!

### **III. Vocal Production for the Tenor**

Chest Voice, Falsetto, and Head Voice

- | Typically we think of two voices for singing, the “chest voice” (the voice we use for speaking), and “falsetto” (the high, airy voice).
- | One set of muscles produces the chest voice, and another set produces the falsetto voice.
- | By learning how to keep both sets of muscles engaged in the right proportion to each other, it is possible to maintain the clear, consistent, brilliant tone required of the tenor part.
- | The key to effective tenor singing is learning how to blend those voices together in what is sometimes called the “head voice” or “mix”

Some exercises to develop the head voice:

- | Lip trills or “bubbles” (octave, octave and a half, octave jump). This exercise gets all of the basic mechanics going (breath support, breath control, musculature).
- | Gug (octave, octave and a half, octave jump). This exercise relaxes the larynx.
- | “Ng” (octave, octave and a half, octave jump). This exercise creates a natural “handoff” from one set of muscles to the next.
- | “BOOM” (descending from the fifth, on last note gently shift to chest. Repeat a half step down, but shift on the last two notes. Etc).

The goal is to learn how to connect your voices so that you can provide whatever your part is called upon to do in any given chord without having to clunkily shift from one register to another.

#### **Conclusion**

Tenors provide the unique qualities that make barbershop BARBERSHOP! Have a blast singing tenor!

#### **Additional Notes**

- 1. Speech Level Singing-Seth Riggs**
- 2.**