

# A Tenor Tantrum: Training the Tenor & Bass Passaggio in Choral Rehearsals

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NAVIGATING THE INTRICACIES OF DEVELOPING YOUNG TENOR AND BASS VOICES AS A CHORAL DIRECTOR CAN PRESENT QUITE THE TASK! THIS CHALLENGE IS COMPOUNDED BY CONFLICTING PERSPECTIVES ON VOCAL TECHNIQUE AND THE ENSEMBLE DIRECTOR'S STRUGGLE TO BALANCE ENSEMBLE NEEDS SUCH AS PITCH AND RHYTHM LEARNING, STYLE, ETC. WITH GROUP TECHNICAL TEACHING IN VERY LIMITED REHEARSAL TIME. THE GOAL OF THIS PRESENTATION IS TO PROVIDE SOLUTIONS TO THE MOST COMMON ISSUES OF DEVELOPING VOICES IN THE TENOR AND BASS RANGE THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF CONTEMPORARY VOCAL PEDAGOGY SCHOLARSHIP.

## Common Vocal Challenges

- Coordination between Breath and Phonation
- Laryngeal Position
- Registration

## Breath & Phonation Fundamentals

Efficient singing requires controlled airflow and balanced vocal fold vibration. Key elements include proper inhalation posture, steady airflow during expiration, and coordinated onset of sound.

## Three Types of Vocal Onsets

Onset Type	Description
Aspirated	Breathy start with excess airflow before vocal folds close.
Pressed (Glottal)	Glottis pressed closed before phonation
Balanced	Breath and vocal fold vibration begin together; efficient onset.

## Posture for Efficient Phonation

- Maintain a “noble rib cage” posture
- Slightly elevated sternum
- Expansion in lower (2) ribs and abdomen
- Avoid shoulder lifting or visible tension

## Understanding Vocal Registers

Mode 1 (Chest/Speech Voice): Heavier mechanism dominated by the thyroarytenoid (TA) muscles.

Mode 2 (Head Voice/Falsetto): Lighter mechanism dominated by the cricothyroid (CT) muscles.

“Mixed Voice” is coordination of these two muscle groups. The term “mixed register” is inaccurate.

## Passaggio Ranges

Tenor: D4 – G4

Baritone: B $\flat$  3 – E4

During this range singers must maintain a stable laryngeal position, using gradual vowel modifications.

## Teaching Strategies

1. Expand the modal (chest) register without pushing, pressing, squeezing.
2. Use vowel modification strategy to ease resonance shifts (e.g., [a] → [Λ]).
3. Encourage expressive vocal sounds such as whining, sighing, or laughing to explore higher pitches without tension.
4. Maintain steady breath energy and avoid shouting.

## Key Takeaways

- Balanced breath and phonation are essential for healthy singing.
- Stable laryngeal position helps singers navigate the passaggio.
- Vowel modification and expressive exercises support smooth register transitions.
- The goal is to expand Mode 1 while avoiding an abrupt flip into falsetto.

## For info / questions / or to collaborate

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