

Choir and “A Cappella”: Bridging the Gap

Intro/Welcome

Choral -> A Cappella: What’s different?

Diction

Rule of thumb: Diction for pop music should be true to natural American speech. If it’s not how you’d say it, it shouldn’t be how you sing it!

- T becomes D
- Ending consonants mostly disappear/get swallowed
- Soft palate position is generally much less raised - **This doesn’t mean vowels should be overly bright!** Often adding a little bit of “eh” or “uh” to the sound can help add richness without adding choral/classical huskiness.

Articulation

Classical/Choral is a straight line. Pop is more of a smudge!

- Pop makes frequent use of scoops, slides, trills, falls, as connective tissue between words. **A common pitfall is to let these articulations affect pitch!** The ensemble should still arrive at the final destination together, they’re just taking a more colorful route.
- Riffs/Runs – What’s the difference? Both vocal embellishments, but:

Riff – Can change direction. Often used repetitively, or in sequence.

Run – Typically moves in a single direction. Often pentatonic. Usually some glottal technique involved to separate notes quickly.

-Pop singing employs lots of riffs and runs, but make sure your ensemble is executing them together!

Vocal Production

- Vibrato – Varies depending on the style. It’s a myth that there’s no vibrato in pop singing! Styles like Gospel, R&B, Soul, Musical Theatre tend to allow for more, while Rock, Dance, Country tend to have less. It shouldn’t be distracting.
- Support is key – especially important in allowing for healthy tone when soft palate is lower/vibrato is more controlled.

Vocal Percussion

-Basic, in-time VP is better than flashy, un-groovy VP! If nobody notices your VP, they’re doing a great job :).

- VP 101 – a super basic kit.
- Fundamentals of VP – It’s the relative difference in pitch between sounds that makes them work, not the fact that they sound exactly like the instrument they’re imitating.

Bass Singing

-Generally, one person on bass is ideal. Allows for maximum creative expression and specificity of tone.

-Don't worry about your bass being loud when singing acoustically. A) They will naturally be heard well as the lowest voice B) The bass is typically more felt than heard in pop music anyway.

Side note: it's often a good idea for your highest soprano to be a single voice as well, for the same reason.

Mic Technique – why proximity is your friend!

Arranging

I highly recommend that at least some of your repertoire come from a professional arranger. This gives your students the opportunity to study what someone with 10-50 years more experience would do, from the inside out.

Be aware of how ranges change when moving! Pop a cappella is more similar to show choir in this respect – it's good to compensate accordingly.

Groove/Independence from conductor

-Group needs to rely on an internal, shared sense of tempo and expression.

A Cappella -> Choral: What's the same?

Vocal health

- Breathing
- Free, unconstricted tone
- Hydration and fatigue
- No tension in neck, jaw, face

Blend

- Vowel shapes for pop are different, but they still have to be unified!
- More diphthongs, require practice to time the changing of vowel/overtone

Balance

-Extended harmonies require similar tuning as traditional vocal jazz/choral. 3rds/ 7ths a little low, etc.

Ensemble Connection

- No conductor, so ensemble has to take more responsibility for communication.
- Group should be empowered to discuss emotion and portrayal.