

A GUIDE TO READING BARBERSHOP MUSIC

Looking at the sheet music

If you don't read music, here are a few tips about how to find and follow your part. There are two separate rows (called "staves") on which the notes for the 4 parts are laid out. Each staff has 2 sets of notes on it. The staves are linked together by a vertical line at the side.

Tenor part: this is the top line of notes on the top staff. The "stalks" of the notes go upwards. The tenor almost always sings the highest notes, but if the tenor note is lower than the lead note, this is marked with an X.

Lead part: this is the melody and it is the second line of notes on the top staff. The "stalks" of the notes go downwards. If the lead is singing notes that are higher than the tenor notes, this is marked with an X.

Baritone part: this is the top line of notes on the second staff. The "stalks" of the notes go upwards. The baritone part weaves in and out of the melody. (For those who read music, the notes are sung an octave higher than written.)

Bass part: this is the bottom line of notes on the second staff. The "stalks" of the notes go downwards. The bass part always has the lowest notes. (For those who read music, the notes are sung an octave higher than written.)

Learning your part

Listening to a recording of your part while looking at the sheet music is a fast, efficient way to learn your music. Use these tips to help you make the best use of this material.

Step One

Pick a time when you won't be disturbed. Get together your recording, the sheet music and a pencil. Play the recording. Just listen the first time while following the notes with your pencil. This will establish a visual pattern in your brain – even if you don't read music, you will see if the notes go up or down, and by how much. Play the recording again and sing along softly, still following the notes with your pencil. This makes you an active participant and will help you learn faster than if you just listen while you are busy doing other things. Repeat this step a couple of times.

Step Two

By now the notes are getting easier, and you can move onto the words. Replay the recording and sing along, following the words with your pencil. Repeat this a few times. Again, this strengthens the visual image in your mind and really helps to make it stick.

Step Three

Stand up, look at the music and play the recording. Using good posture and breath support, sing the section along with the recording. This establishes a *physical* pattern or "feel" to integrate what you have already done by *looking* at the music and *listening* to the CD. Repeat this until you can sing the whole song accurately. When you can do this, try it without looking at the music.

You will learn the music much more quickly and effectively if you use this method than if you just sing along to a CD while you are driving in your car!