

## “Reading” a song for effective ballad phrasing

Determine the structure that comprise the arrangement: intro, verse, chorus, bridge, chorus II, tag, etc.

Look at each piece and determine the *dynamics* as “dictated” by the music: high points, voicings, embellishments, etc.

Try to plot *increasingly wider dynamic contrast* in each section of the song. This increases the drama and helps build momentum as you move toward the climax of the song.

*Dynamic shading* (crescendo, decrescendo, etc.) should be added after the main dynamic points have been planned. Keep in mind that dynamic shading can happen across successive phrases.

After plotting dynamics by the music, look at the *lyrics* for any mismatch...tender lyrics/loud volume, etc.

Keep in mind that dynamics are only effective (and rewarded by the Music and Expression Judges) if they make musical and lyrical sense and are well executed by the singers - in other words the skill set of the singers matches the demands of the plan.

Consider quartet vs. chorus *breathing plans*.

- Staggered breathing is an option for a chorus if they can use the technique without loss of singing space (incomplete resonance) and/or momentum (synchronization errors).
- Layered breathing is an option for quartet and chorus...one part breathing while another sustains.
- Try to follow a long phrase (esp. chorus) with one or two short phrases. The ability to execute phrase delivery with finesse will improve. The basic sound of the ensemble will also be more consistent and they will be more likely to retain their resonance.

Once the breaths are planned, consider the  *pacing*.

- It should compliment the build of your  *overall* dynamic plan.
- In most cases, you will accelerate the breathing as you accelerate the music.
- This acceleration should also match the increasing intensity/passion of the lyrics.

Be judicious in the use of  *dramatic breath timing* (e.g.: delay breath, timed breath, etc.). It's no longer dramatic if the technique is overused.

Be sure to include  *internal dynamics*. The consistent use of this technique helps propel the horizontal delivery of the phrasing and helps maintain forward motion. Chorus directors: Be sure they are “singing your hands”.

Look for  *rhythmic patterns* within each phrase to help you move smoothly in synch through the phrase.

Finish your plan by “backing up” to  **look at the whole song** - music and lyrics.

- Is the plan singable? Can the singers execute this plan with their current skill set?
- Is there logical flow from one phrase to another? Or does what you have planned at the end of one phrase make the beginning of the next awkward?
- Is there an overall sense of build to the plan?
- Have you made sure to include the tag in the overall “feel” of the plan? Or does the tag sound “tacked on”?