

# Principles of Interpretation (Directors Class)

## Handouts

What is Interpretation and How Do I  
Do It?

Some Principles of Barbershop  
Interpretation

Look for Clues in the Music

## **PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION**

### **WHAT IS INTERPRETATION AND HOW DO I DO IT ??**

**Interpretation is the creative art of bringing out a musical work's expressive qualities. Our ultimate goal as performers is to elicit an emotional response from our audience. Interpretation is achieved in several ways:**

- **Cultivate the expression of the lyrics**
- **Observe the music's expressive features**
- **Add nuances and embellishments to enhance the message**
- **Perform the song with stylistic accuracy**

#### **Interpreting a ballad:**

- **Lyrics are all about drama and storytelling**
- **Music is about the chords, melody line, artistic arrangement**
- **Sound is about vocal qualities, vocal textures, dynamics**
- **Different types of breaths create drama, mood and excitement**
- **Physical involvement – natural and genuine body language**
- **Artistic textures**

#### **Interpreting an uptune:**

- **Tempo, rhythm – downbeat/backbeat, tempo changes, accelerandos, push beats, syncopations**
- **Dynamics, vocal flexibility, color and texture changes, inflections and embellishments, artistic textures**
- **Using the arrangement to work for you, not against you**
- **Finding and using the lyrical and musical highpoint**

## SOME PRINCIPLES OF BARBERSHOP INTERPRETATION

- Interpret the SONG (words, melody, harmony and chord voicing) as a whole, don't interpret by sentence or lyrical/musical phrases
- Plan dynamics that are within the capabilities of the group. Work in rehearsal to broaden your dynamic potential but be careful not to overextend during performance.
- Sudden, abrupt changes from loud to soft or vice versa are rarely appropriate and should be done with great discretion.
- Try not to merely sustain a long note. Keep it in motion, sending it forward by use of varied dynamic or intensity (breath support).
- Do not add pressure to naturally accented beats but lighten up on the subordinate beats. The result will be freedom, flow and grace. The secondary beats will be stepping stones rather than places of rest. Forward motion and flow, always desirable, will be the result.
- Vary phrasing – try not to repeat the same patterns. Lyrical repetition can easily be varied by using different emphasis, rhythm change, syncopation, dynamics, inflection or pace.
- Endeavor to keep breath support and intensity clear to the end of each and every phrase. Phrase ends “feathering out” are usually the result of improper breath support, inertia or doubt as to where the cut off the phrase end.
- Always preserve a flow or forward motion regardless of the speed of the lyric line..unless you are using a tension breath or “pregnant pause” for effect.
- As singers, we sometimes tend to slow soft passages and speed up loud passages...treat crescendos and decrescendos as fabulous opportunities to add color, interest and drama to your performance.
- When directing or singing a ballad, be aware of how the phrase line should flow and try not to direct or sing each and every syllable.
- When directing or singing an up tune, you will usually learn the chart at a slower speed than desired. Remember to maintain the rhythmic values desired then speed up to the desired pace.
- Plan choreography to enhance the music and interpretative plan.

**LOOK FOR CLUES IN THE MUSIC**

- Octave locks
- Understand the chord structure
- Chromatic series (step up big, step down small)
- Coning factors
- Theory details that can be confusing
- Tricky rhythms, syncopations
- Downbeat, back beat, pulse, push beats
- Implied melodies
- Dynamic opportunities (director's plan)
- Phrasing notations
- Breath plan
- Moving parts vs. static parts
- Be in touch with what other parts are doing with the music
- Tempo issues
- Sustained target vowels
- Diphthongs
- Pickup parts (usually lead and bass)
- Repeated passages with different notes
- Key changes