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PROBLEMS OF TESSITURA IN RELATION TO CHORAL MUSIC

It is common knowledge that a great many teachers of singing hesitate to permit their pupils to participate in choral singing because experience has proven that due to the unusually high TESSITURA dominating the arrangements of many choral works, harm is done to the voice.

The subject of TESSITURA involves certain basic facts pertaining to the safe use of the singing voice. These, in the opinion of many teachers, have been and continue to be widely misunderstood and frequently disregarded by composers, arrangers and publishers. In order to clarify the basic principles involved, and their practical application, the American Academy of Teachers of Singing presents the following beliefs which have been reached through prolonged investigation and study, and confirmed by experience.

In this connection the designation TESSITURA, or "heart of the range," is used in accordance with the defini-

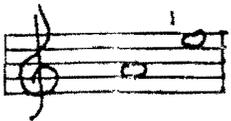
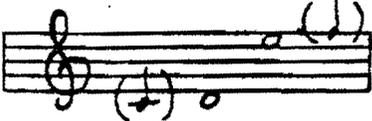
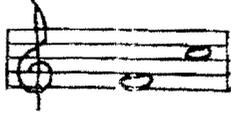
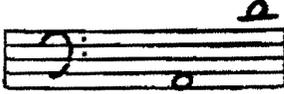
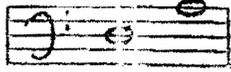
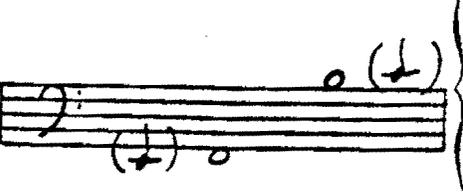
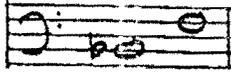
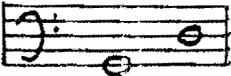
tion given by Grove's Dictionary as "the prevailing or AVERAGE position of the notes in relation to the compass of the voice, whether high, low or medium", and is not to be confused with the word RANGE. In the following tabulations the vocal limits allocated to the various voices are those of the AVERAGE AMATEUR SINGER and not the professional artist, and refer only to CHORAL MUSIC.

WE BELIEVE

1. That a general tendency exists among composers and arrangers to write voice parts in a dangerously high TESSITURA, and that continued singing in this high TESSITURA is apt to strain and even permanently injure young and adolescent voices and prevent normal development of the vocal apparatus.

2. That the safest and best RANGE and the safest and best TESSITURA for the various voices are as follows:—
(The TESSITURA limitations do not prohibit the composer and arranger from writing for the full RANGE of the voice.)

VOICE	RANGE	RANGE	TESSITURA	TESSITURA
First Soprano	(D) E to G (A flat)		A-E	
Second Soprano (Mezzo)	C to F		F-C	
Alto	(G) A flat to C (D)		(2 Tessitura)	
			Upper- Eb-Bb	
			Lower Bb-F	

		RANGE		TESSITURA
First Tenor	(D) E to F sharp (G)		A-E	
Second Tenor	(C) D to E (F)		F-C	
Baritone	A to D		D-A	
Bass	(E) F to B (C)		(2 Tessitura) Upper Bb-F	
			Lower G-D	

NOTE: If composers and arrangers would keep within the suggested RANGE and favor the recommended TESSITURA, voices will be protected and the choral music will be more effective when performed.

3. That although group singing tends to reduce the mental hazard, no singer can be expected to sing in ensemble a high tone he cannot sing reasonably well in solo. For example, the tenor section as a unit cannot be expected to negotiate high B flat if members of the group cannot sing it individually.

4. That the easiest VOLUME for singers in the upper half of the range is best vocalized MEZZO-FORTE, and that successful PIANO and PIANISSIMO singing are more difficult and require training and guidance.

It must be repeated—and emphasized—that the above beliefs refer to CHORAL SINGING by AMATEURS. Directors will find in their groups individual voices of greater range than the ones cited above, but such individual cases cannot be considered as the standard in estimating the safe range and tessitura for the average voice.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Published music should provide some indication of TESSITURA as well as RANGE. The range of a song

may be conservative and yet the tessitura so high as to constitute a strain on amateur voices.

Voice teachers and choral directors should avoid cataloguing voices, particularly male voices, with any degree of finality if the student is less than twenty-two years old. The young voice, and especially the untrained one, may not reveal its adult calibre in the earlier years.

Chorus directors should assume the task of keeping in touch with the progress of individual voices, and because this involves frequent voice trials and the willingness to shift a singer from one part to another, it is frequently neglected. There is the endless temptation to encourage young people to sing certain parts not because their voices are ready for this particular tessitura, but because the chorus needs more voices on that part. The choral director should restrain his ambition to produce a perfectly balanced ensemble and to perform over-ambitious musical programs at the expense of the vocal welfare of his individual singers. This effort on his part would be minimized if composers and arrangers will consider carefully this important matter of TESSITURA, and confine their writings within the safe compass of the average young voice.



[Since 1922, the year of its founding, the American Academy of Teachers of Singing has been actively writing and disseminating papers on all subjects pertaining to the teaching of singing. Inevitable changes in the profession itself and in musical life in general have since demanded that the Statements from the Academy be brought up to date. This Statement, changed to its present form in 1997, was originally published in 1944.]