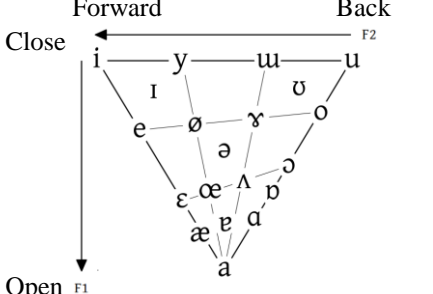
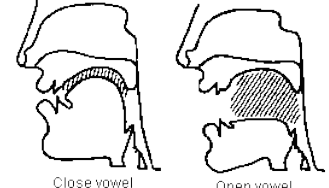


Translating Singer Speak: Terms, Descriptions, Examples

Melissa Malde, June 10, 2019

| | | |
|----------------|--|--|
| Bright | Can be innate and/or cultivated. A tone emphasizing high overtones. Ways to brighten the tone: move the tongue forward, raise the larynx, widen the mouth opening, allow <i>nasality</i> , cultivate the <i>singer's formant</i> through <i>chiaroscuro</i> or <i>twang</i> (see below). Not all of these movements work in all styles. | Naturally bright: Pavarotti singing <i>E lucevan le stelle</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TU5roitYI1s Unstylistically bright: Sara singing Debussy's <i>Romance</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EygqAguMVhA&list=PLtV0Z3_JXIKCUsmcC6n2f8BVzBgrQPQAd |
| Dark | Can be innate and/or cultivated. A tone emphasizing low overtones. Ways to darken the sound: lower the larynx, cultivate a vertical mouth opening. Pulling the tongue back and/or down creates an over-darkened tone that sounds <i>woofy</i> or <i>swallowed</i> (see below). | Naturally dark: Domingo singing <i>E lucevan le stelle</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gS98ARvQM4 Artificially dark: Keith singing <i>Old Man River</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vDIUmA-saY |
| Forward | 1. Singing with the hump of the tongue in the front creates <i>front</i> or <i>forward vowels</i> (i, e, æ). 2. Resonance created with the tongue forward as a whole and/or that creates a sensation of vibration in some part of the face is often described as forward. Often used synonymously with <i>bright</i> , though they are not quite the same. |  <p>Both Pavarotti and Domingo sing with forward resonance but Pavarotti has an inherently bright voice and Domingo has an inherently dark voice.</p> |
| Back | 1. Singing with the hump of the tongue in the back creates <i>back</i> or <i>dark vowels</i> (u, o, a). 2. Resonance created with the tongue drawn back as a whole is often described as back. Often used synonymously with <i>dark</i> . | |
| Open | Technically, referring to vowels made with an open jaw (a, ε, æ, ɔ). However, this can also refer to an open sound in general or an open throat. See <i>space</i> for further discussion. | <p>Cecilia Bartoli using both open and closed [a] in <i>Agitata da due venti</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4It44mYw2I</p>  |
| Close/Closed | Technically, referring to vowels made with a closed jaw (i, u, e, o). However, some singers sing open vowels with a closed jaw for the sake of focusing the tone. | |
| Vowel Matching | Modifying vowels so that they have similar ring. Front, back, open and closed vowels resonate optimally on different pitches so singers make small adjustments in the jaw and tongue to keep the resonance in line. Some singers over-modify vowels so there is little clarity. | Pavarotti and Sutherland singing <i>Parigi o cara</i> . His vowels match but are distinct. Hers are over-modified so that they all sound the same. Singing starts at :50, after riotous applause. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5r4XJJYvnZE |
| Shallow | Larynx high, soft palate neutral, usually also <i>breathy</i> , often <i>spread</i> . | Shallow tone: Diana singing <i>The Black Dress</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTNnH2Co-ek |
| Nasal | Resulting from releasing the muscles that raise and stretch the soft palate (levator veli palatini, tensor veli palatini) allowing resonance in nasal cavity. This is cultivated in character voices, nasal consonants, French nasal vowels, and by many pop/country singers (Miley Cyrus, Shakira, Merle Haggard). Otherwise, it is generally pejorative. | Difference between sensation of resonance in the nose and nasality explained and demonstrated: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2rL3l5rgkw Character voice (musical theatre): <i>Adelaide's Lament</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RX-eFkGdJNM Alyssa singing <i>The Daisies</i> with nasality https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lzge5P11Fp8 Aubrey singing <i>The Daisies</i> without nasality https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Z2Gks_Q0n8 |

| | | |
|----------------|---|--|
| Spread | Horizontal mouth opening caused by engaging buccinators. A wide mouth opening is appropriate in many styles of singing, but not classical. | Spread classical singing: princessofmusical singing <i>Sento nel core</i> (start around :50) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79nLiPPnByQ |
| Woofy | Overly darkened vowels resulting from the tongue low and back. The tongue as a whole being drawn back and down into the pharynx. This sounds rich and full inside your head, but woofy to your listeners. | Woofy classical singing: Graham singing <i>Gia il sole dal Gange</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PmvpW5KJKew |
| Covered | The vowel modification basses and baritones use from C3 – F4 in order to transition from their low to high range. What this should be is modifying the vowel slightly in order to allow the larynx to stay low and shift into head voice. In practice, men often sing too dark, too far back, and distort the vowel beyond recognition. Sometimes this is explicitly called for as a vocal color by composers, (Verdi: <i>cupo</i>) in which case it means making the vowel darker by moving the hump of the tongue farther back and lowering the larynx. Here are the vowels Caruso used to navigate this <i>passaggio</i> (register transition) [a ɑ ɐ ɔ o u ʊ ʌ æ] | Pavarotti attempting to explain covering. He does not have the language to describe it accurately, but the example at 1:00 is excellent: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JIVs9FZ8sQ Jussi Björling (in Swedish) but good examples of singing uncovered and covered starting around 1:00: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOQj4U_ATv4 Brief excerpt for bass, followed by an excerpt from <i>Largo factotum</i> sung by many professional baritones singing with varying degrees of covering: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxYAHZ2pU44 |
| Knödel | Root of tongue pulling up on larynx for a strangled sound. Knödel literally means dumpling in German and this sound results from a hard lump of tension at the root of the tongue. | Knödel – another example of what happens without proper vowel modification (<i>covering</i>) through the <i>passaggio</i> : Carlos singing <i>Tu lo sai</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJ3dfUxN5WY |
| Flow Phonation | Allowing the mucosa covering the vocal folds to vibrate freely with the breath flow. The vocal folds do not need to be closed tightly to produce pitch or resist the breath flow. In flow phonation, resonance is in charge of focusing the tone, providing the ring that helps resist the breath flow and carry the voice. This is the opposite of <i>pressed</i> . | Any professional classical singer sings with flow phonation: Von Stade singing Russalka's <i>Song to the Moon</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwVYFpY3VL4 This video shows how the air stream causes a ripple in the membranes covering the vocal folds (<i>mucosal wave</i>). This woman's production is slightly breathy. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Tlpkdq8a8c |
| Pressed | Vocal folds over-adducted, pressed together to resist the breath flow. | Pressed production: Andrew singing <i>Purple Summer</i> (at 37:10) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3WdZ46LCYk |
| Pushed | Excess breath pressure against over-adducted vocal folds, often associated with heavy registration and lack of vibrato. | Pushed singing (female) Sunny singing <i>O del mio dolce ardor</i> (at 1:20) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5rOXTdMxxk Pushed singing (male): Case singing <i>Vittoria</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSixBLqXLr0 |
| Breathy | 1. More breath is escaping between the vocal folds than is needed for phonation because the folds are not adducted firmly. Sometimes this is a conscious color choice (Marilyn Monroe, jazz, pop). In prepubescent singers, this is developmental. 2. White noise in the sound caused by inefficient resonance (see <i>shallow</i>). | Example of the first phrase of a pop song sung first with breathiness, then clear resonance, and then with vibrato starting at 4:10 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqVvIqcOFFs Breathy classical sound due to lax adduction: Caleb singing <i>Across the Western Ocean</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLuDjOc4PAM Breathy classical sound due to inefficient resonance: Dielle singing <i>Amarilli mio core</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAbrCqxZVbg |

| | | |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| Space | <p>Singers often think they need <i>more space</i>. They usually don't think about <i>where</i> the space should be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft palate up + larynx low → vertical space (see <i>chiaroscuro</i>). • Jaw open → space in oral cavity (see <i>open/close</i>). • Buccinators engaged → horizontal space (see <i>belty/spread</i>). <p>Optimal space depends on vocal acoustics and vowel formants. Often, singers need <i>less</i> space, especially in the oral cavity, in order for the tone to focus.</p> | |
| Back Space | <p>Usually synonymous with pharyngeal space and often cultivated with the feeling of a yawn. This terminology attempts to add warmth and depth but often leads to <i>woofy</i>, overly <i>dark</i>, or <i>swallowed</i> singing and pharyngeal tension. The only way to create more space in the pharynx is to keep the tongue forward, larynx low, soft palate high, and release the pharyngeal constrictors.</p> | <p>Too much back space: Montgomery singing <i>Come raggio di sol</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eo-CMt_VxVU</p> |
| Singer's Formant Ring/Ping | <p>An extra resonance that is independent of pitch created by adjusting the relationship between the size of the opening of the larynx and the size of the laryngeal pharynx. Classical singers achieve this with <i>chiaroscuro</i> (lowering the larynx) and MT/CCM singers achieve it with <i>twang</i> (closing the aryepiglottic sphincter).</p> | <p>Monica singing <i>O del mio dolce ardor</i> in d minor without the Singer's Formant (shallow) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKPx3YITfZY Hailey singing <i>O del mio dolce ardor</i> in e minor with the Singer's Formant (<i>chiaroscuro</i>) Note that, despite the higher key, this voice sounds deeper because low overtones are emphasized by <i>chiaroscuro</i>. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=977UB_kUYlo</p> |
| Twang | <p>Two definitions: 1) The nasal pronunciation of country western singing is one, but not the one that is usually meant when current singers use this term. 2) The narrowing of the aryepiglottic sphincter (the opening of the larynx into the pharynx). This is a different way of creating the singer's formant without lowering the larynx so the vowels stay brighter. Favored by MT and CCM singers.</p> | <p>Explanation of twang (starting at 1:05) with examples (starting at 4:48): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BLVrYKmwvc Ethel Merman <i>There's no Business like Show Business</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PliQMsdQ0Uo</p> |
| Belty | <p>Generally twangy, wide, slightly heavier than classical singing. When pejorative, usually means that a singer is carrying a low register higher than is healthy.</p> | <p>Tenor singing a classical song in a belty style (without covering): Nathaniel singing <i>Whither Must I Wander</i> (at 51:00) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Iz0-wnSmhM</p> |
| Heavy | <p>Produced with thick vocal folds. People with inherently robust folds have <i>heavy</i> voices. However, they can still choose to sing with a light mechanism (Mode 2/Head Voice). Carrying Mode 1/Chest Voice into a range where it is inappropriate will sound bright/open and heavy/pushed. Often confused with <i>dark/back</i>.</p> | <p>Light voice singing heavy and bright: Katelin singing <i>Vittoria mio core</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ex_GXAMwQyw Heavy voice singing with light mechanism: Jessye Norman singing <i>Ave Maria</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=do5ZmQQM8AE</p> |
| Light | <p>Produced with thin vocal folds. People with inherently slender vocal folds have <i>light</i> voices. However, they can choose to sing heavier by tensing and thickening their vocal folds (Mode 1). This is not healthy when habitual. Carrying Mode 2 down into a range where one would normally use Mode 1 will make the sound light and often breathy. Often confused with <i>bright/clear</i>. Darkening the sound with a low larynx will allow the singer to transition into a lighter register.</p> | <p>Light and warm: Ruth Ann Swenson https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vgMX8fNsdU</p> |