

SINGING SONS: ***Nurturing Boys' Voices from Six to Sixteen***

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Handout and resources online at <http://www.mrlj.com>

*"Be affirming for a boy that his vulnerability is human and acceptable. Once you understand that to be human is to be vulnerable, whether you are a boy or a girl, then you can go on and be brave, confident, and productive from a solid foundation. You don't have to hide your vulnerability from yourself, and so you are not deeply afraid or fragile".*

From "Raising Cain" by Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson

**A. Nurturing Boys Voices from Six to Sixteen**

**1. Steps to Success**

- Listen often to singers alone.
- Identify range and tessitura of your singers.
- Choose repertoire that fits singers' strengths.
- Encourage students to sing where they ring.
- Mask a choir's challenges by considering all voicings and styles.
- Develop artistry & musicianship with singers sharing different roles and parts.

**2. Other Factors that Influence Vocal Quality**

- Home environment: vocal modeling by others.
- Organic causes: hearing, fatigue, allergies etc.
- Natural environment: dampness, cold, dust, and smoke.
- Psychological: emotional stress or immaturity.
- Physiological: poor breath support, lack of kinesthetic awareness and coordination in the vocal mechanism, nodules, inflamed vocal folds.

**3. Facts about Boys' Voice Change**

- Every voice change is unique.
- Voice change can begin as early as 9 or as late as 15-16.
- One part may not fit one voice. Boys may need to sing "excerpts" of parts.
- Stages of change can last days or months.
- Frustration is common no matter what stage.

**4. Strategies for Working with Male Changing Voices**

- Place boys with changing voices near you.
- Let boys sing alone and unaccompanied.
- Be prepared to transpose at any time.
- Avoid associating gender with parts.
- Group 2 or more boys singing similar parts together.
- Assure boys that voice change is normal and indicates they are maturing.

## 5. Helpful Musical Elements in Repertoire for Changing Male Voices

- Limited range within some parts (6th)
- Melodies that can be doubled in octaves
- Closed chord harmonies
- Repetitive/ostinato patterns within contrapuntal harmony
- Melodies shared by more than one part
- Motives that are easy to hear, sing, and remember.
- Phrases with descending minor thirds
- Staggered entrances
- Paired parts-SA/TB or ST/AB

### Common Octave Naming System

Scientific	C-1	C0	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9
Helmholtz	C,,	C,	C	C	c	c'	c''	c'''	c''''	c'''''	c''''''
Organ	64 Foot	32 Foot	16 Foot	8 Foot	4 Foot	2 Foot	1 Foot	3 Line	4 Line	5 Line	6 Line
Name	Db1 Contra	Sub Contra	Contra	Great	Small	1 Line	2 Line	3 Line	4 Line	5 Line	6 Line
Midi	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
Midi Note	0	12	24	36	48	60	72	84	96	108	120

## B. Singing Sons: Stages of Male Voice Change

Practical application and terminology based on research by John Cooksey and others, Musical examples provided by students and choirs directed by Dan LeJeune. Visit [www.mrlj.com](http://www.mrlj.com) to see resources not listed in this handout but presented during the workshop.

### Stages of male voice change (Cooksey)

#### 1. Male Treble Voice (spending little time on this due to familiarity by attendees)

- Light voice quality, commonly through age 10-11.
- Greatest resonance often occurs prior to voice change.
- Can sing upper or lower parts with clear tone and good intonation
- Flexible voice with ability to sing wide range of dynamics

### Repertoire Considerations

- Unison to 4-part music
- Ranges of A3-F5, with C#4-A#4 tessitura
- Able to sing SA parts with wide range
- Music with equal voicing possible.

## 2. *Early Stage Changing Male Voice*

Appears on average between ages 10-12, some in HS.  
Light quality, more breathy with less clarity and projection above C5.  
Best range Ab3-C5, with tessitura B3-G4.  
Less flexibility, especially in upper range.

### **Repertoire Considerations**

Choose music with some parts below C5.  
Include music with narrow range melodies (5-7 notes)  
Simple or repetitive lower harmonies help boys develop confidence in new range.  
Find music which features the lower part singing the melody.  
Look for music with melodies or parts that can be sung in octaves.

## 3. *Middle Stage Changing Male Voice*

Average age 13-14. Late 7th-early 8th. Gr.  
Voice quality can be breathy or husky, with decreased projection and agility.  
Falsetto emerges usually above G4, with decreased pitch accuracy in upper range.  
Alto is often too high, tenor is too low. Pitch range F3-A4, but G#3-F4 realistic.  
Vocalizing should include helping boys bring falsetto downward.

### **Repertoire Considerations**

Find music with strong melodies/parts between F4-F5 that can be doubled by changing voices an octave lower F3-F4.  
Seek SATB music with strong upper range tenor parts and bass lines that can be doubled. Avoid baritone notes much below C3-D3.  
Carefully assess SAB & 3 part mixed voicing. 4-part music usually works better.  
Avoid part writing that requires boys to sing awkward leaps. Stepwise is best.  
Closed position harmonies can be quite effective and give the choir a fuller sound.

## 4. *Later Stage Male Changing Voice*

Most insecure time for a boy's voice, usually age 13-14 (late 7<sup>th</sup>/into 8<sup>th</sup> gr).  
Husky tone, often with noticeable register breaks.  
Unstable upper range, often with emerging baritone notes in lower range.  
Falsetto transition is challenging for some boys, and some have no falsetto.  
Pitch matching difficulty/intonation issues are common during this stage.  
Pitch range D3-F#4, tessitura F#3-D4 but realistically, best range is F3-C4.  
Part assignment requires creativity and sometimes incorporates multiple parts.

### **Repertoire Considerations**

Boys need vocal rest within the music. They should not be expected to sing every note of their parts. Their voices are different each day!  
Carefully vocalize the falsetto within warm-ups, but realize boys begin to be proud of this new sound so they will use it if you request it!  
Choose music that alternates SA with TB or pairs ST/AB.  
Avoid parts with many sustained pitches for an extended period of time.  
Look for ways a part can be shared between T/B or S/A.  
Breath control is an issue as boys learn how to support their new range.

### 5. *Emerging Adolescent Male Voice*

Often referred to as “new baritone”, average age 14, but normal range 13-15.  
Some boys in 7th/8th grade, but many at this stage are in 8th/9th grade.  
Sound is gaining clarity but lacks fullness of an adult male voice.  
Voice is becoming less breathy, with more stability in falsetto range.  
Some boys may have no sound C4-G4, yet they can sing above that!  
Projection still limited, and some bass parts too low.  
Pitch range B2-D#4, tessitura is D#3-A#3, but realistic range is Bb2 or B2-C4.  
Intonation issues appear, especially in upper range above A3.

#### **Repertoire Considerations**

Seek SATB or TTB music now due to wide variety of male changing voices.  
SAB or 3 part mixed music is often too high for baritones and too low for tenors.  
Voices beginning to regain some flexibility and can sing more complex lines.  
Improved balance with treble voices begins to return.  
Voices still require rest within a part. Remind boys they may not have every note of every part yet in their range but they can sing what feels comfortable.  
Avoid bass parts below A2 or tenor parts below F3.  
While there are glimmers of an emerging SATB sound, they are not ready for high school level repertoire due to limited range and endurance.

### 6. *Mature Adolescent Male Voice (overview only-I defer expertise to others)*

Generally boys in this stage are in 9th gr. or beyond, and age 14-15+.  
Emergence of unique vocal quality that will develop into adulthood.  
Range expansion continues as boys become confident with new instrument.  
Tone is more stable and consistent, gaining focus but lacking the range and color of fully mature adult male voices.  
Upper range and falsetto gain clarity and flexibility.  
Bass-baritone parts accessible, range of G2-D4, tessitura B2-G#3, but best range tends to be Bb2-A3.  
Boys have some tendency to push in their upper range.

## **C. Final Thought**

"However much we stumble, it is a teacher's burden always to hope, that with learning, a boy's character might be changed, and so, the destiny of a man." From *The Emperor's Club*, Beacon Communications, LLC 2002

Thanks for attending today! Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. Visit my website at [www.mrlj.com](http://www.mrlj.com) to see suggested repertoire for each stage and other information pertinent to today's presentation.

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