

Embellishments...Barbershop Ear Candy!

One of the signature elements of the barbershop style is the use of embellishments/nuances. They provide interest in lieu of instrumentation and, when executed well, can add drama and emotion to the performance. Solid vocal skills and finessed attention to detail will make even seemingly insignificant embellishments thrive.

To Execute BBS Embellishments:

- ALL embellishments are worthy of our musical attention & creativity.
- Motion is needed in ALL parts – even the ones ‘holding’. Forward motion is critical.
- Embellishments are *moving* sound – NOT just changing pitches.
- Volume and/or rhythmic changes are effective tools to utilize in most embellishments.

Types of Embellishments & Nuances:

The Echo

- The most common embellishment.
- Primary lyric and repeat lyric (i.e. echo) should NOT be executed identically.
- Different cadence, word emphasis, dynamics, & vocal textures are tools to add needed variety.

The Power Swipe

- Is sung on a single (matched & resonated) syllable.
- Build and expand air BEFORE beginning the swipe.
- Move the sound up and away before beginning to change notes.

The Contrary Motion Swipe

- Usually a three note (or chord) progression.
- The two parts in opposing motion pass through an octave on the middle chord.
- The part(s) holding a pitch must expand and support the moving parts – no stagnation!

Unison

- Demands pitch accuracy by all singers.
- Singing space (resonance) needs to be matched.
- Vowels must be matched.

The Peel Off

- Frequently begins as a unison by two or more parts.
- Execution demands are the same as Swipe & Unison above

Patter

- All four parts do not sing the same words simultaneously.
- Accurate rhythm needed – chords need to line up as written.
- Enunciation & word clarity are vital.

The Melody Hand-off

- A subtle, therefore, more demanding kind of vocal nuance.
- Requires heightened attention to shared vocal space by the two parts executing the hand off.
- Ideally, the execution is so seamless the listener is not even aware it occurred!

Solo Passages

- The 'back-up singers' need to keep the sound moving to support the solo.
- The soloist has more freedom to add color and personality.
- When solo is not by the lead, make sure the listener's attention is commanded by the soloist.

Bell Chords

- All parts are of equal value, i.e. coning rules do not apply.
- Accurate timing is critical.

Barbershop embellishments and nuances are **fun** to execute and add a great deal of personality, drama and character to the performance – **USE THEM!**

References: JCDB, Many SAI and BHS teachers