

Chapter 1

So You Want To Sing . . .

In This Chapter

- ▶ Examining the contents of this book
 - ▶ Exploring what you need to know and when
 - ▶ Finding out how to use the materials in the chapters
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So you're curious about singing. Congratulations on being brave enough to pick up this book and improve your singing skills. Whatever musical background and experience you have or don't have, this book has something to offer you. The book contains great exercises and even a CD that allows you to hear the exercise and sing along. If you're a beginner, welcome aboard. You can find out all kinds of cool info about singing in this book. This chapter provides an overview of all the great stuff that you can encounter in the book.

I Love to Sing! What Singing Is Really All About

Singing is one of the coolest means of expression out there. If you stop and think about it too long, singing may not make much sense, but it really feels good. Singing well is about knowing how to work the parts that create the sound for singing. The chapters that you encounter in the book outline what you need to know in just the right sequence. You don't have to read them in the order written to get what you need. Some of the later chapters may be a little difficult if you don't have any singing experience. The only way to know is to jump right in and start reading on whatever topic interests you.

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What You Want to Know Right from the Beginning

Before you choose the date for your first big concert or recital, you want to find out about singing before you step out onto the stage. The first part of this book provides you with the big picture. First, you want to get yourself aligned — that is, line up all your body parts to get ready to sing and then explore your breathing. Breathing while singing isn't that much different from how you breathe normally, but you have to take in more air and use more air. When you get the air flowing, you can explore the tone of your voice.

Correcting posture for a better sound

Posture is important to sing well. If all the parts for singing are lined up correctly, you stand a really good chance of getting wonderful sounds to come flying out of your body. Knowing how to stand isn't rocket science, but it may take a little adjustment on your part. If you aren't used to standing tall all the time, you may feel a bit awkward at first. Chapter 2 explores posture for singing.

Knowing the keys to proper breathing

The big key to great singing is knowing how to use your breath to make the sounds. You may not know how to get much breath in your body and then make it last throughout a long phrase. If you check out Chapter 3, you can find all kinds of exercises and explanations of how to work on your breath, so you can sing those long phrases in your favorite song.

Locating the notes on the staff

Voice types are probably easier to figure out if you know where to find the notes on a musical staff. (See Figure 1-1 in this chapter.) The treble clef spaces correspond with the notes F, A, C, and E. Beginning on the bottom of the staff and going up, it spells *face*. You can use sentences to remember the other notes. Again, starting on the bottom line and moving up, the notes on the lines of the staff are E, G, B, D, and F, letters that begin the words of the sentence, *Every good boy does fine*. For the bass clef, the spaces are A, C, E, and G, the letters that begin the words *All cows eat grass* or *All cars eat gas*. The lines in the bass clef are G, B, D, F, and A, which correspond with *Good boys do fine always*. If you prefer animals, then use *Great big dogs fight animals*.

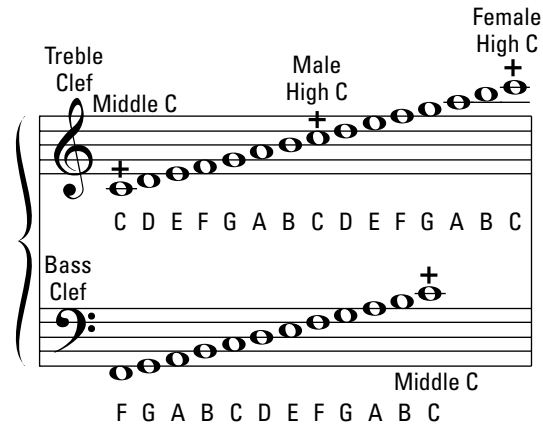
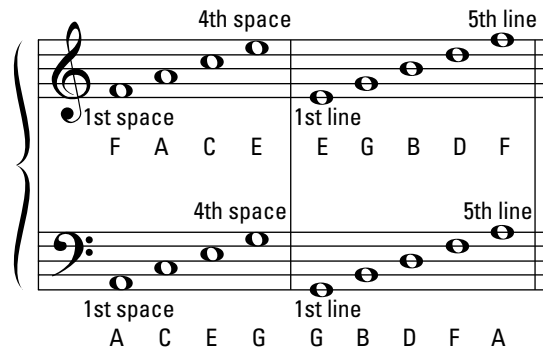


Figure 1-1:
Locating
notes on
the staff.



If I say that a singer's range is Middle C to high C, I have to use ledger lines to notate those two notes, because they're not within the five-line staff. Ledger lines are extra lines added above or below the staff for those notes that are higher or lower than the notes on the staff. When you find Middle C in Figure 1-1, you can see the extra line added below the staff. The easiest way to find Middle C on the piano is to look at the brand name printed on the lid covering the keys. If you find that brand name, the C right in the middle of that name or just to the left, is usually Middle C.

Middle C is called *Middle C*, because it's in the middle of the keyboard that contains 88 keys. Middle C is also called C4, because it's the fourth C on the keyboard. The names of the notes are A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. Those notes repeat over and over on the piano. If Middle C is C4, then the next C above is C5 and so on. C is the note just to the left of the pair of black keys. The distance

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between the two Cs is called an *octave*. If you start counting at the first C and count eight white notes up, you find another C. That means the E just above Middle C (C4) is E4. Easy enough but not every person you encounter knows this system, so I stick to what works: Middle C.

You also encounter the words *flat* and *sharp* in this book. *Flats* lower a pitch one-half step and a *sharp* raises the pitch one-half step. F-sharp is the black key on the piano between F and G. The same black key between F and G can be called G-flat.

Finding your tone and resonance

Vocal tone is important, because you want the best sounds to come out of your mouth. By exploring exercises on tone, you can make changes to your sound. People often tell me that they want to change the way that they sound. To change your sound, you need to know how you create sound. The two chapters on tone, Chapters 4 and 6, give you quite a bit of information about how to start a note and then what to do to make the note sound a specific way.

Developing Your Singing Voice

After you have the basic information swimming around in your head, you can start to work on your singing voice. Chapters 5 through 9 offer you more specific information about how to create a sound that's unique to you. Sometimes, singers try to imitate their favorite famous singer. What you want to do is sound like yourself. Your voice can be just as fabulous as that famous singer. You just have to practice to develop it.

Determining your voice type

Most singers want a category to belong to. You may have heard of the categories of singers — soprano, mezzo, tenor, and bass. If you aren't sure which one applies to your voice, explore Chapter 5. You can find explanations of what makes a soprano different than a mezzo or a tenor and a bass. You don't have to figure out your voice type today, but you can explore the chapter so you know what to listen for as you sing.

Fine-tuning vowels and consonants

A long time ago in grade school, you had to work with vowels and consonants. Well, you can refresh yourself in Chapters 8 and 9! By making your vowels and consonants specific, you can make yourself easily understood when you're singing. You've probably heard someone sing but couldn't understand a word they said. It's even worse when the song is in English or a language that you speak. By knowing how to articulate vowels and consonants, you can create specific sounds that your audience can follow.

Warming up your voice — practice makes perfect

After you discover all this great information about singing, you need to make a plan of practicing it on a regular basis. If practicing seems like a foreign concept to you, check out Chapter 10. The whole chapter is devoted to helping you figure out what to do when you warm up and how to apply the exercises that you read about in the book to your daily practice routine. Because you can explore so much, make a list of what you want to accomplish today and then add more to that list each time that you practice.

Working the Different Parts of Your Voice

Your goal is to make your singing voice sound like one smooth line from top to bottom. Your voice may have a few bumps and wiggles as you work your way up and down. That's perfectly normal, but help is right at hand. Chapters 11 through 13 work with specific areas of the voice called *registers* — chest voice, head voice, middle voice, and falsetto. In these chapters, you can discover what each part of the voice feels like and what to do with it.

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Strengthening your middle, chest, and head voice — a complete vocal workout

The first step in the workout for the voice is to find the different registers of the voice and then notice what each feels like. After you find them, you want to try and smooth out the transition between the registers. You may find that your chest voice and head voice feel miles apart. The exercises in Chapters 11 and 12 are designed to help you smooth out the bumps. You may not think the exercises are easy in the beginning, which is good. I don't want you to be bored. Even if you've never explored any vocal sounds, you can figure out these exercises and get your voice in good working order, which just takes some time and patience.

Working as guys and gals

The exercises in this book are for both male and female voices. In Chapter 13, you can find some exercises that help either gender and that are unique about your voice. Guys have a register called *falsetto* but the girls don't. Don't feel bad ladies, you can still sing along with the exercises that are for the male voice. I give you plenty of ideas for working the exercises.

Applying Your Technique

After you explore your technique through the exercises that I provide, you need to take the next step. Chapters 15 through 19 are about applying your technique. At some point, you want to apply that healthy technique to songs. You also want to maintain your healthy technique and a healthy voice at all times.

What to look for in a voice teacher

Finding a voice teacher can be tricky. After you find the teacher, the experience can be rewarding. If you aren't sure how to go about finding a teacher, explore the tips and suggestions in Chapter 15. Finding the teacher may be the most difficult part. After you answer the questions in Chapter 15, you have a better idea of what you want from voice lessons.

Choosing appropriate singing material

Finding new songs to sing can be overwhelming. You have so many choices, but how do you know what works for you? The clues are in Chapter 17. The lists there offer you suggestions of what to look for and what to avoid when choosing songs. Whether you want a song to sing for your own pleasure or a song for a specific function, you want a song that accentuates your strengths. After exploring the technique chapters earlier in the book, make a list of what your voice does well. For more suggestions of songs, you can explore Appendix A for a list of suggested songs for enhancing your singing technique. The songs cover different styles of music from classical to country.

Feeling comfortable with the music and text

After you choose the song, you need to know how to decipher and digest what you see on the page. Listening to a recording can be deceiving, because the artist may not be singing what's on the page. Look at the page and feel confident that you can conquer the melody, rhythm, and the text. Don't worry if you can't read music. You don't have to. You can explore the steps in Chapter 18 to get you singing the song in a shorter amount of time. You can take this skill a step further in Chapter 19 and explore acting to combine with your singing. Sounding good when you sing is great, but you want to sound good and understand the story behind the music. You don't have to know anything about acting to explore this chapter. It's all right there for you.

Applying Technique to Performance

After your technique is really cooking, you can explore Chapters 20 and 21 about taking your technique into a performance situation. Performances can be big or small. Whatever the size of the audience, you want to look like a pro and feel good about what you're doing onstage.

Overcoming performance anxiety

If your daydreams of singing are clouded with anxiety about singing in front of an audience, Chapter 20 is just for you. By confronting your fear and taking charge, you can make progress and let go of the anxiety. You only add pressure to your performance if you assume that you're supposed to be totally calm. Many famous performers get nervous before a performance. After

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exploring Chapter 20, you know that it's fine to be nervous, but you can still sing while nervous.

Auditioning for a singing role

So many singers dream of auditioning for a Broadway show that I wrote a whole chapter about it. Chapter 21 has information for you about what to expect at the audition, who may be there, what you may have to sing or do, and how to prepare for the audition. Because an audition for a musical is different than an audition for an opera, you want to know what's kosher and what's not.