

Music Theater (MT) Category Revisions Approved by the Mid Atlantic Region, April 13, 2007

- G. One Music Theater legit (Head Register Dominant – cricothyroid [CT] muscle dominant) selection premiered in 1960 or before, sung in the original or published key. (Representative composers: Loewe, Rodgers, Gershwin, Berlin, Kern)
- H. One Music Theater non-legit (Chest Register Dominant - thyroarytenoid [TA] muscle dominant) selection premiered in 1960 or before, sung in the original or published key. Representative composers: Lerner, Rodgers, Gershwin, Youmans, Berlin, Kern)
- I. Music Theater works published from 1961 to 1990 sung in the original or published key. (Representative composers: Lerner & Loewe, Sondheim, R. Adler, Schonberg, Lloyd Webber)
- J. Music Theater works published from 1991 to present sung in the original or published key. (Representative composers: Sondheim, R. Adler, Schönberg, Lloyd Webber)

High School: 2 or 3 selections - 1 from G, 1 from H, and optionally a third selection from G, H, I, or J

College/Continuing Ed: 4 selections - 1 selection from G, H, I, and J

Teachers should consult www.ibdb.com (the Internet Broadway Database) to determine the date of the original premiere.

Rationale for Music Theater Category Revision

There is a strong need to update and refine the Music Theater Category. During the last 50 years the vocal requirements of the MT singer have changed and continue to expand. Our requirements for the MT category have not kept up with the pace.

Students earning a music Theater degree or intending to pursue a career in Music Theater need to learn a healthy Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) technique to audition for roles in their chosen field. Many professional Theater auditions require the singer to demonstrate vocal registers and musical styles; thus, it is important from a learning standpoint to require the same of the NATS MT Category.

The Classical Categories require different periods and styles of music be represented by the singer. For example, the classical singer does not perform an art song the same way he performs an aria. Nor does the MT singer sing a torch song or ballad the same way she sings an up-tempo selection.

The Mid-Atlantic NATS continues to encourage teachers and their students to choose healthy MT repertoire for the auditions. The revisions address this by implementing a requirement for all entries to sing a “legit” and a “non-legit” piece premiered in 1960 or before. The revisions also protect our younger High School singers by keeping them out of potentially unhealthy belt literature written post-1960. Most “non-legit” MT repertoire written prior to 1960 does not push chest register past an octave above middle C with only a few pieces up to a D. As always, the goal is to sing this style in a healthy way; therefore, full-out “belt” throughout a song is not recommended.

The following may answer questions you have regarding the MT singer's tonal production and the judging of the music Theater category.

Here is an excerpt from Johann Sundberg's article "Comparison of Pharynx, Source, Formant, and Pressure Characteristics in Operatic and Music Theater Singing," Sundberg, Gramming, Lovetri, *Journal of Voice*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1993:

Scientific Characteristics of each style:

- OPERA:** *Moderate subglottic pressure and glottal adduction, moderate jaw opening, lowered larynx, peak glottal permittance, short closed phase, good visibility of folds, strong fundamental, strong singer's formant.*
- MIXED:** *Moderate subglottic pressure, moderate glottal adduction, wider jaw opening, slightly raised larynx, second formant highest (but first was present,) side walls of pharynx slightly advanced, folds less visible, singer's formant present.*
- BELT:** *10 decibels louder, high subglottic pressure, high glottal adduction, widest jaw opening, raised larynx, side walls very advanced, sinus piriform small, no fundamental, long closed phase, folds almost hidden, low singer's formant.*

TRANSLATION

- OPERA:** *Moderate breath pressure and folds touching loosely, mouth open small amount, throat relaxed and open, larynx low, "ring" in sound.*
- MIXED:** *Moderate breath pressure, folds pressed together some, mouth moderately open, throat slightly constricted, larynx slightly raised, "ring" present but less than in opera.*
- BELT:** *High breath pressure and volume, folds pressed tightly together, mouth wide open, larynx raised, throat very constricted, no amplification of pitch being sung, no "ring".*

Some technical elements of singing—Dr. Johann Sundberg:

1. *The vocal folds determine the airflow.*
2. *The vocal folds vibrate differently in different registers.*
3. *Our posture largely determines how much air we get.*
4. *Singers have 20% more vital lung capacity, not because they take in more air, but because they squeeze out more air. We empty the lungs more completely than non-singers.*
5. *The larynx itself can change shape.*
6. *A register is a unified group of sounds with one tonal texture and acoustical behavior.*
7. *1st and 2nd formants determine the vowel; 3rd, 4th, and 5th formants determine the resonance and timbre (vowel color), and are often grouped together as the "singer's formant".*
8. *The side walls of the pharynx are the constrictors (the swallowing muscles).*
9. *More than 50 sets of muscles are involved in making sound; the tongue alone is 35.*

BELTING

The definition of, teaching of, and "safety" of belting is controversial
Most agree the muscle energy to produce belt exceeds that needed for other tone qualities
Frontal resonance is an undisputed characteristic

Most agree that a "mix" of head and chest voice is necessary for vocal health
 Most agree that belt requires a higher laryngeal position than classical singing

(Provided by Edrie Means Weekly, VA NATS Board)

“LEGIT” & “NON-LEGIT” within Music Theater Singing

In the professional music Theater world, the terms “legit” (short for “legitimate”) and “non-legit” are used to differentiate between the more classical singing style required for songs such as “Out of My Dreams” (*Oklahoma*) and the “belt” singing style required for songs such as “Adelaide’s Lament” (*Guys and Dolls*).

If you look at the characteristics of “classical” singing below, you will find that only slight modifications will create the legit Broadway singing style. Also, the words must be as clear as possible and high-quality acting is prioritized. Legit songs are often sung by the ingénue and/or her romantic partner such as Julie and Billy Bigelow in *Carousel*.

Non-legit Broadway women’s singing style encompasses a range of possibilities, from a mix needed for “I Get A Kick Out of You” (*Anything Goes*) to the powerful belt required for Mama Rose’s anthem “Rose’s Turn” at the end of *Gypsy* to the rock-style belt used in “Defying Gravity” from *Wicked*. Non-legit songs are usually sung by character actors such as Ado Annie and Will Parker in *Oklahoma*.

Men sing in both styles as well; however, the difference between their legit style and non-legit style is not as obvious, since their singing tone more closely resembles their speaking tone. It becomes more obvious in the rock musicals.

The following table provides guidelines for judging MT and has been adopted by the Mid-Atlantic Region. The guidelines are provided to each MT judge at the state and regional auditions:

A COMPARISON BETWEEN CLASSICAL AND MUSIC THEATER SINGING

	CLASSICAL*	MUSIC THEATRE
TONE	Of primary importance and takes precedence at times over clarity of text <i>Chiaroscuro</i> is the ideal – both brilliance and richness desired Low larynx, high soft palate, consistent pharyngeal space maintained Breathiness and nasality are not present CT-dominant (cricothyroid muscle) in middle range as well as high range	Beauty of tone secondary to clarity of text Speech-dominated Brighter, brassy sound Laryngeal height and oral/pharyngeal shape are variable Breathiness and nasality may be used for vocal color or expression TA-dominant (thyroarytenoid muscle) in low and middle range
VOWELS	"Tall" – strong resonance in fundamental and higher harmonics Formant tracked to permit projection over orchestra	"Wide" – stronger resonance in higher harmonics Speech-like, w/out formant tracking which is unnecessary because of amplification
CONSONANTS	Sometimes articulated softly or ignored for the sake of vocal beauty	Stronger consonants for word definition

DYNAMICS	Crescendos often result in increased vibrato and opening of vowel	Crescendos call for maintenance of straight tone until the end, when vibrato is added (in "belt" and jazz styles) Speech-like vowel quality is maintained
VIBRATO	Initiated at onset of phonation Continuous throughout Always even Between 4 and 7 cycles per second Approximately ½ step excursion above and below the given pitch	Usually initiated toward the end of a sustained tone Only used for expressive purposes on sustained tones Less excursion above and below given pitch Faster or slower cycles than in classical singing are acceptable
RANGE	Performer stays within his/her "Fach" Only pitches which can be produced freely and beautifully are performed in public	Extreme ranges of pitch and loudness are sometimes called for
ACTING	Secondary to beauty of sound, although of increasing importance, particularly in the opera world	More important than sound quality Projecting the meaning of the text through facial expression and body language required

*Some music Theater singing more closely resembles classical singing, such as in *The Music Man* or *Phantom of the Opera*, but still requires clarity of text and strong acting ability.

(Provided by Sharyn J. Mapes, President SC NATS)

MUSIC THEATER SINGING STYLE

Music Theater demands a variety of singing styles, from classical (*Phantom of the Opera*) to "belt" (*Evita*) to pop (*Mamma Mia*) or rock (*Rent*). For non-classical styles, the following characteristics may be considered when judging music theater:

ACTING

Is as or more important than sound quality
The emotions of the character are expressed vividly, with use of facial expressions and body movement

TONE

Beauty of tone secondary to clarity of text
Speech-dominated
Brighter sound, occasionally strident sound called for
Laryngeal height and oral/pharyngeal shape are variable
Operatic resonance may not be necessary due to amplification
Breathiness and nasality may be used for emotional expression

VOWELS

Vernacular speech is required

"Wide" – stronger resonance in higher harmonics
Frontal resonance is emphasized

CONSONANTS

Stronger consonants for word definition
The consonant /r/ is hit harder

DYNAMICS

Depending on the style, crescendos call for maintenance of straight tone, until the end when vibrato is added
Speech-like vowel quality is maintained
Extreme ranges of dynamic levels are sometimes called for

VIBRATO

May be initiated toward the end of a sustained tone
May only be used for expressive purposes on sustained tones
May have less excursion above and below given pitch
Faster or slower cycles than in classical singing are acceptable

RANGE

Extreme ranges of pitch are sometimes called for

BELTING

The definition of, teaching of and "safety" of belting is controversial
Most agree the muscle energy to produce belt exceeds that needed for other tone qualities
Frontal resonance is an undisputed characteristic
Most agree that a "mix" of head and chest voice is necessary for vocal health
Most agree that belt requires a higher laryngeal position than classical singing

Sharyn J. Mapes