



Doing a Vocal Assessment with Island Bel Canto Singers

We have been upfront about the fact that Island Bel Canto Singers is an auditioned choir. So it shouldn't come as a surprise that you will need to do an audition. The word "audition" in and of itself naturally induces a nerve-racking, anxiety-inducing response. To help alleviate this angst, we prefer to call them vocal assessments.

Island Bel Canto Singers is not a "Y'All Come", unauditioned choir because of the complexity of the music that we perform. Vocal assessments are an important process for our membership, so that our collective voices can create the best possible Island Bel Canto Singers sound.

- The human voice is naturally in a state of flux, changing throughout our lives. Because of this inevitable changing of our voices, I will assess each singer's voice every two years to understand the qualities that you will bring to choir and be sure that you sing the part that is the most comfortable for you.
- We will perform some of the most beautiful and intricate music written for the adult treble voice. I will be listening for:
 - The timbre/tonal colour of your voice.
 - The range in which you feel confident and most at ease.
 - The regions of your voice that are the most stable.
 - How you are able to hear harmony notes (I'll explain later).
- Most importantly, I want to get to know all the wonderful qualities of your unique instrument!

Remember this: if you can match pitches and have a timbre of voice that will blend with the choir, you are a good candidate. So relax and have fun!

How/when do you do the assessment?

- To begin, you'll need to download, fill in, and email the *Getting to Know You* form to me before your assessment. The information you provide will help me understand your background without taking undue time during our time together. I will keep this information confidential and on file for my records.
- We will hold the assessments during the last half-hour of our first few rehearsals of the term, that way you will be nicely warmed up. Each assessment takes about 6–7 minutes.
- If you do end up changing to another voice part, not to worry, there is plenty of time before concert to learn the new part!

What will you sing during the assessment?

I have created an audio track (available on our website) with the following exercises you will be asked to sing during your vocal assessment. You can also use it to practise your scales and harmony note recognition:

1. **Five-note descending major scale** starting in D major (1st note is the A on the 2nd space of the staff). We will ascend on various vowels in this order – twice on each vowel "ee, eh, oo, oh, ah".
2. **"Throwing fifths"** (do – sol – do; 1 – 5 – 1) starting on A above middle C to the highest notes of your range on "Ya – ah – ah".
3. **Five-note descending major scale** starting in Bb major (1st note is the F on the 1st space of the staff). We will descend to the bottom of your range, singing "mini-mini-mini-mini-mee".

4. **Hearing harmony notes.** This may be new to you, so a little practise will help. Singing harmony notes is important, but it may not be a “deal-breaker” if you find it difficult at first. Think of it as a game you can play to improve. I give several examples of each of the following. Your assessment will only include one or two of each:
 - a. Sing the top note of two notes, played at the same time on the piano. This is like singing the melody.
 - b. Sing the bottom note of two notes, played at the same time on the piano. If you are used to hearing harmony notes, this is as if you sing alto in a two-part piece.
 - c. Challenge, if you can do the previous examples: sing the middle note of a three-note chord, as if singing 2nd soprano.
 - d. Challenge, if you can do the previous examples: sing the second from the bottom note of a four-note chord, as if singing 1st alto.
5. **Sing O Canada** in Eb Major (start on G4 – second line of the treble staff), a cappella in English, French or both! I will be looking for:
 - a. Your ability to stay in the key of Eb and sing the intervals in tune.
 - b. A nice smooth (legato) vocal line with good enunciation.
 - c. A chance for you to show your unique voice.

In closing

I promise you that every singer I have ever ‘auditioned’ (there’s that word!) in my 25 years of choral directorship history, has come away saying, “That wasn’t scary – it was actually fun!”

Remember, our goal is to provide you with a place in the choir where you will succeed and, most importantly, have the happiest, most positive experience possible; at the same time, to sing gorgeous music that lifts not just our souls, but those of our family, friends and IBCS fans!

Don’t hesitate to contact me if any of this needs clarification or you have comments, questions or concerns. My job is to assist you!

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A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fiona" followed by a stylized flourish.