

# How To be a Great Tenor

**Don Kahl helps you improve your tenor-singing techniques.**

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*Submitted by Don Kahl, tenor, Rural Route 4, 1986 International Quartet Champion*

Describing how to sing great tenor is a bit like demonstrating how to dry one's back without using one's hands. You pretty much learn by doing and not by reading. Does reading an article in a golf magazine help your game? There are, however, some tips that are translatable to your tenor-singing techniques.

Sometimes, in our attempt to conserve enough air to maintain support through a phrase, we don't achieve preparatory breath well in the first place. Make the breath part of the release while forming the next intended target.

Barbershop performers are always behind the focus of the ensemble sounds we create. Listen carefully.

Shift body weight at appropriately frequent intervals. Maintain shoulder posture, and keep chin and Adam's apple in a comfortably low position.

There is no such thing as justly-tuned barbershop tenor singing as a half step. Tenors need to work diligently to sing in tune with the lead. Be alert to the need for lifting or settling certain intervals as you rehearse and perform.

The chord that the audience perceives as ringing is because of instantaneous adjustments. A tenor and his lead can never duet too much.

Imagining or looping one's performance is excellent for creating a consistent and positive frame of mind. Run through your entire performance in your mind. The more you prepare yourself the more confident you'll be. Rehearse not just enough to get it right, but enough to never get it wrong.

Every tenor I ever heard, to a greater or lesser degree, was and is one of my favorites. But there are three men who are at the top of my personal list. Each of these men was blessed with consistently accurate melody singers. (Tuning is less a problem when the melody is well sung.) Two of these men may not be as well known as the third, but they are giants to me and taught me well.

- Gene Cokecroft was flawless as he sang with the Suntones, and he has an unbelievably beautiful voice. For his unfailing artistry in every performance, he tops my list.

- Ed Rooker sang with the Central States District's legendary Merry Mugs quartet in the early days in my barbershopping life. The happiness that filled Ed's eyes when they performed has been a beacon to me during some of my most stressful performances.
- Dale Radford possessed a crisp, lyrical and clear, almost Irish tenor quality. I recall his voice atop more than one Southwestern District foursome. Watching him taught me much of what I now describe as instant matchability.

But, as I said earlier, and I mean it, every tenor is my hero. To Gene Cokecroft, Dale Radford and the late Ed Rooker, my everlasting thanks for what you taught and gave me. Now, if anybody wants to know even more firsthand how we pass on the gospel of great barbershop tenor singing, come to Harmony College someday, and I'll see you in class.

### **Don's eight tips for better tenor singing**

- Breathe to consume air, not to conserve air
- Finish phrases with a breath
- Listen harder
- Move feet to stay fresh
- There are no half-step intervals
- Duet the melody
- Rehearse until error-free -- then do it again
- Loop your performance