

Middle School Choral Pedagogy & Reading Session

by

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Beautiful Tone

- Developing a beautiful choral sound takes time.
- Start with head voice, descending 5-note pentachord.
- Unify ensemble sound to attain tuneful singing, using free and open vowels from all singers.
 - Use pure vowel sounds.
- Unify a) vowels, b) volume, c) vibrato (if present).

In-tune singing principles

- Identify instances when notes are most likely to go out of tune:
 - a) repeated notes
 - b) sustained notes
 - c) descending patterns.
- Practice with a UNISON a cappella piece learned by rote with text, then solfege by discovery, then score. Add ostinati as part singing and for tuning purposes. UNISON piece in solfege by rote, a cappella, then score. Add ostinati as part singing and for tuning purposes.

Directing

- “Follow me” – **All things** are prepared in live music performance; each performance is slightly different from previous or future ones. As directors, our duty is to create organic performances where we get to influence our groups’ musical interpretation. In order to avoid a carefully-prepared choreographed performance (in opposition to an organic one), teach singers to understand that our gestures are meaningful and must be learned to follow.
- By preparing the following elements, among others, we can create beautiful and meaningful performances.
 - Breath
 - Entries
 - Cut-offs
 - Dynamics
 - Tempo changes
 - Character changes/transitions
 - Rhythmic subtleties
- Ultimately, our personal musicianship will carry us as we lead our groups.
 - Establish tempo before starting a piece, by hearing it first in your head.
- TCD: Preparatory beat shows Tempo, Character, Dynamics.
 - Give **one full beat only** when bringing in a group together to sing (partial beat entries require we show the previous full beat). All must breathe together and learn to discern a director’s non-verbal cues.
 - Practice this until mastered.
- Cut offs – create a point of intersection of two non-parallel fields, cutting off in character. Avoid circle cut-offs—a circle has no beginning nor end.

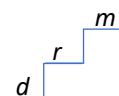
Musicianship – Passing on the Gift

- Passing on the gift of musicianship and music literacy should be thought as an investment in your group and one at large. It requires time but bears endless fruit.
- In the beginning, all groups can be treated as older beginners of musicianship.
 - If they are advanced, they can progress immediately through the tonal and rhythmic elements and treat the older beginner lesson as review.

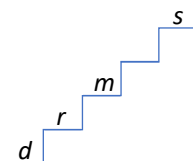
- If they are less experienced, they will need more time to master each of the elements, while gradually progressing.
- Training our singers' musicianship and developing their listening skills will develop their inner ear and ultimately, music reading readiness and musical independence.
 - Gradually breaking down a score as much as possible before handing it to them, will guarantee a successful first read, later allowing more time to master all the other musical elements.
- Vowel unification is essential at all times, and part of musicianship and tuning.
 - Teaching singers the vowel placement principles of the five pure vowels must be paired with close monitoring of improvements and challenges in every rehearsal.
- Selecting appropriate and high-quality repertoire is essential to each singer's musical education, emotional development, and furthering of their technique.
 - Folk song arrangements are preferable for beginning repertoire since their melodies have been a) composed through oral intergenerational tradition, b) are a familiar element to the culture surrounding us, and c) stood the test of time.
 - Folk repertoire can serve as vehicles to mastery of art music, including world music repertoire.
 - Use pop/Disney music sparingly.
- Pitching warm-ups in higher keys will expand singers' range and help them shift smoothly into mixed resonance.
 - If someone does not match at first, stick to this plan and they will eventually find their upper range just by matching the group—group effort is a powerful tool.

Musicianship – Solfege Discovery through Warm-ups

- Vocal warm-ups using *do pentatonic* scale tones.
 - *m-r-d* pattern on 'oo', preferably start in a higher key to develop range (E=do, ascend by whole step). Have students show melodic contour by moving hands according to pattern.
 - Students can show melodic contour by moving hands according to pattern.
 - Ask: "How is this musical pattern moving?" (down). "Are the notes close to each other or do you hear skips?" (Close to each other. Label them as 'moving by step'). T labels the tones + Curwen hand signs (*mrd*), Sts sing back. Write tones on tone ladder on board, point to ladder on each set. Tone body placement: *do-waist, re-cross arms across the chest, mi-shoulders*. T. sings improvised patterns, Sts sing back using body placement of tones.

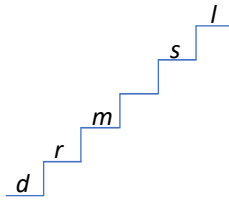


- Extend to *m-s-m*. T sings *mi 'oo' mi* (using F or G as *do*). Sts show melodic contour. Ask: "Are the notes moving by step or by skip?" (Sing it slowly so they hear a skip [if they answer "next to each other," then sing *mi-fa* on 'oo' and say 'this is a step; T sings *mi 'oo' mi*, ask again, by now they will hear the skip). T labels the new tone + Curwen hand sign. Sts sing back. Write new tone on tone ladder on board. Review by singing ascending & descending pattern *d r m s m r d*. Tone body placement: *so-head*. T. sings improvised patterns, Sts sing back using body placement of tones/Curwen hand signs.

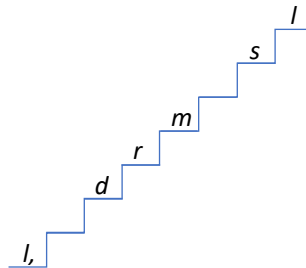


- Extend to *la* above *sol*. T sings *m-s- 'oo'-s - m*, students show melodic contour with hands while singing. Ask: "Is this tone higher or lower than *so*? (Higher). Is it a step or a skip above *so*? (Step). T sings pattern and labels the new tone + hand sign. Write new tone on tone ladder on

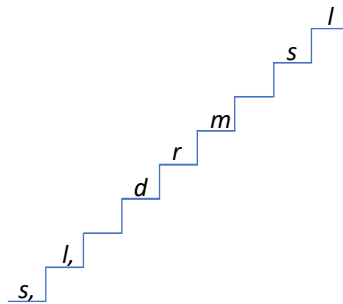
board. Sts sing back the pattern *m s l s m*. Tone body placement: *la-arms above head*. T. sings improvised patterns, Sts sing back using body placement of tones/Curwen hand signs.



- T. sings descending *do pentatonic* scale, adding low *la* on 'oo'. Ask: "Is this tone below or above the final *do*? Sts: below. T. "Let's call it 'low'. Repeat singing descending *do pentatonic* scale. T. Ask: Is this low tone a step or a skip from *do*? Answer: a skip. Repeat *do pentatonic* scale, ascending & descending. T. Ask: "Does this low tone sound like one of the higher tones on this scale?" Sts: Sounds like a low *la*. Label by T. singing it once alone, ascending. Write new tone on tone ladder on board. Sts. Sing back. Place low *la*, on thigh. Practice: T. sings improvised patterns, Sts sing back using body placement of tones/Curwen hand signs.



- T. sings descending *do pentatonic* scale, adding low *sol* on 'oo'. Ask: "Is this tone below or above low *la*,? Sts: below. T. "Let's call it 'low'. Repeat singing descending *do pentatonic* scale. Ask: "Is this low tone a step or a skip below *la*,? Answer: a step. Repeat *do pentatonic* scale, ascending & descending. T. Ask: "Does this low tone sound like one of the higher tones on this scale?" Sts: Sounds like a low *sol*. Label by T. singing it once alone, ascending. Write new tone on tone ladder on board. Sts. Sing back. Place low *sol*, on knees. Practice: T. sings improvised patterns, Sts sing back using body placement of tones/Curwen hand signs.



Folk Song Arrangement

- A *do pentatonic* folk song will allow for the group to tune with more ease, and eventually transition easily to diatonic major scale.
- For the first choral piece I prepare with a group, I try to use a folk song arrangement containing a *do pentatonic* melody (even if it is not one we eventually perform, or which is partially pentatonic).
 - A canon, learned by rote, can serve as a perfect introduction to singing polyphony while these elements are taught consciously.

- If no octavos are available for a given group, there are other ways to implement *do pentatonic* folk song repertoire drawn from widely available folk song anthologies.
 - teach f.s. in unison
 - add a simple ostinato
 - add sustained pitches
 - sing as a round (all pentatonic songs work out in imitation).

Old Dan Tucker Arr. Leavitt

1. Old Dan Tucker's a fine old man,
Washed his face in a frying pan.
Combed his hair with a wagon wheel,
And died with a toothache in his heel.

Refrain

Get out the way, Old Dan Tucker,
You're too late to come for supper,
Supper's over and dinner's cookin'
And Old Dan Tucker just standin' there lookin'.

2. Old Dan Tucker he come to town,
Swinging the ladies 'round and 'round.
First to the right and then to the left,
And then to the one that you love best.

3. Old Dan Tucker, he came to town,
Riding a billy goat, leading a hound.
Hound gave a yelp, the goat gave a jump
And threw ol' Dan right on his, So...

- Teach by rote, pitching higher, using correct vowels through modeling, correct style. Make each repetition a musical experience and an opportunity/new reason to discover a musical element after each performance of the song on each repetition.
 - Sing, keep beat
 - Sing, clap rhythm (Say: Let's clap the words of the song with our hands, gently)
 - Sing, two groups, alternate beat/rhythm.
 - Repeat v. 1 until it is well learned.
- **Tones:** T reviews *do pentatonic* scale learned earlier. Extract tones using tone placement with extended arms, isolate each of the patterns. Ask: "What tones do you hear?" Allow students to find out. Sing song again with text, when you reach that point, sing that section in tones. Extract another portion, repeat until the entire song is 'discovered' by all in tones. Sing/Clap rhythm, using solfege, showing contour.
 - **Hand staff:** Identify 'do' on space 2, etc.
 - T. touches the tones from the board using scale on staff (this will highlight the rhythms).
 - A few Sts can go up to the board and do it after T.
 - Teaching the concept of key signatures could be taught two different ways: 1) as they come up in repertoire ("when there are 3 sharps in the key signature, space 2, A, is *do*"), or 2) teaching the circle of fifths gradually.

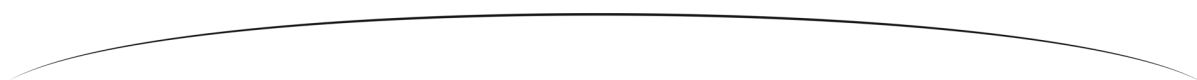


Since directors are constantly preparing new repertoire for upcoming performances, it is challenging to re-use former do pentatonic repertoire. The handout included provides additional folk song arrangement suggestions for varied voicing.

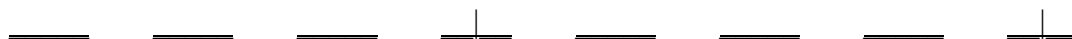
- **Form:** Isolating the phrases will allow for each musician to discover the overall structure of the song, going from large to small elements.
 - While singing, draw ‘rainbows’ in the air to isolate the ‘musical sentences’ (label concept: musical phrases).
 - Ask: “How many phrases do you hear?” **All Sts** show the answer by raising hand and showing the phrase number with their fingers while they make the shape of the phrase, and at the beginning of each phrase. Do again and confirm. (4)



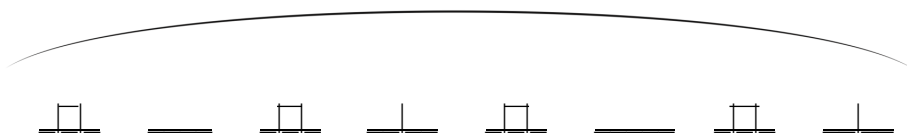
- **Beat representations:** Ask: “How many beats are on phrase 1?” (Surprise questions keep students engaged. I always confirm answers—ask the same question for all phrases in the song).
 - While singing, T. write 4 rainbows on board while students sing and show ‘rainbows’ in the air, using text (it is useful to go back to text to review the original song, but solfege is okay if group is ready).
 - When completed, Sts keep beat on body while T draws beat representation under each phrase.
 - Extension activity: Sts can create their own stick notation score on regular paper, following each item T introduces.
- T claps rhythm under each beat while all sing folk song (use first phrase only, at first, with slower tempo while discovering).
- Ask: “How many sounds did you hear on the last beat of the first phrase?” Sts answer: 1. T sings phrase on ‘loo’ while clapping the rhythm, and on the last sound labels *ta* for quarter note: “When we have only one sound in a beat, we use the rhythm syllable *ta*. Sts practice doing this next.



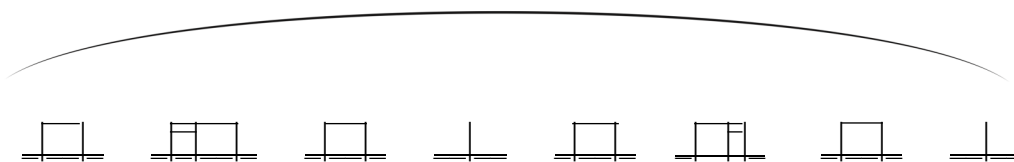
- Ask: “Did you hear another beat on this phrase that also has only one sound?” Sts answer: 4th beat. T sings on ‘loo’ while clapping rhythm on top of each beat to confirm and singing *ta* when the rhythm appears. Sts practice doing this next.



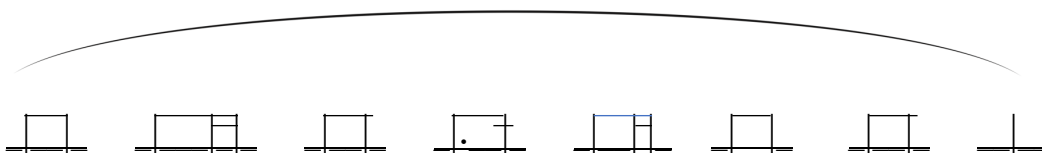
- Ask: “How many sounds did you hear on the second to last beat?” Answer: 2. (Write two rhythm stems on beat 7).
- Ask: “Were there any other beats on this phrase where you also heard just two sounds?” Answer: Also on beats 1, 3, 5. Write two equally spaced stems on these beats. Confirm by singing and clapping again. Ask: “Were both sounds equally long?” Answer: Yes. (If they do not answer correctly, show it again with more emphasis). Sts gently clap the rhythm while listening to the T. sing (on ‘loo’) and clap rhythms, while singing *ta* and vocally label the new rhythm syllables, *ta-di (ti-ti)*, (‘loo’ on unknown rhythms). Sts practice doing this next physically/orally/aurally.



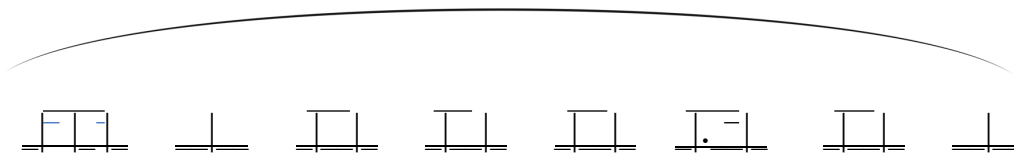
- Go back and beam up, explaining when there are two equally long sounds on the beat, they receive one straight beam.
- Ask: “Did you notice other rhythms in this phrase that are not *ta* or *ta-di*? Answer: Yes. Ask: “Which beats?” Answer: 2 & 6. Ask: “How many sounds on beat 2?” Answer: 3. Isolate beat 2. Ask: “Are all the sounds equally long, or are there some that are shorter or longer than others? Clap again, while singing the text, if necessary. Answer: No, one is longer than the others. Ask: “Which one?” Answer: The third of the three sounds. T. claps & sings the entire phrase, using the new syllables. Label rhythm syllable *ta-ka-mi*.
 - Explain: Because the third sound is longer, we put more space between it and the first two sounds, and the short sounds will get two beams. T. writes the 3 stems representing 2 sixteenth notes and 1 eighth note.
- Follow the same questioning process for beat 6, asking which of the three sounds is longer (the first). Label rhythm syllable *ta-di-mi*.
 - Explain: Because the first sound is longer, we put more space between it and the second and third sounds, and the short sounds will get two beams. T. writes the 3 stems representing 2 sixteenth notes and 1 eighth note.
- Practice singing the whole phrase using rhythm syllables.



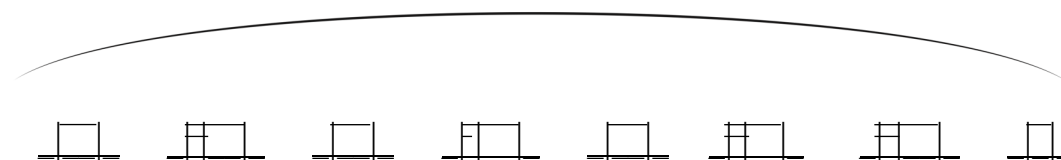
- Practice singing the whole phrase using rhythm syllables.



- Phrase 3 has a new rhythm: sixteenth, eighth, sixteenth.



- Phrase 4 has all known rhythms. Confirm, and sing in rhythm syllables.

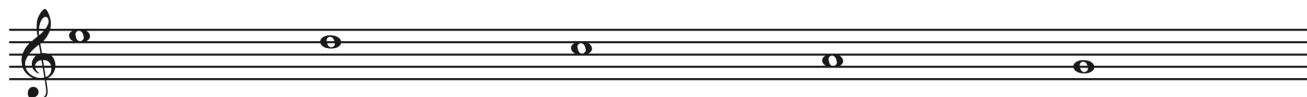


- Review entire song (verse 1) using rhythm syllables, then solfege. Label the form of each phrase using letters. Ask if the second phrase is same/different from previous.

- **Meter:** Find the strong beat of the song by patching strong beat on thigh, then snapping subsequent beats in the air.
 - Count how many beats in all until the pattern repeats (4).
 - Place accent mark on top of each ‘beat 1’ of the pattern.
 - Present concept of ‘meter’: a recurring pattern of beat groups that can be separated by a bar line.
 - Add bar lines after each four beats, erase accent mark.
 - Write ‘4’ to the left of the first phrase, and provide equivalent **C**, for common time.
- **Key change:** Review new ‘do’ (B-flat—when there are two flats in the key signature, *do* is on line 3) on hand staff, then read from reduced staff below.



- **Key change:** Review new ‘do’ (C—when there are no sharps or flats in the key signature, *do* is on space 3, or middle C) on hand staff, then read from reduced staff below.



- **Key change:** Review new ‘do’ (D) on hand staff, then read from reduced staff below.



- Sight-read octavo, one verse at a time, melody first in unison, using solfege, then go back and add all the other elements found in the arrangement.
- As could be expected, it is rare for a pentatonic folk song arrangement to include strictly pentatonic harmony throughout. This is a good opportunity to introduce the diatonic scale that includes *fa* (the tone between *mi* and *so*, moving by step), and *ti* (the tone between *la* and *do*, moving by step), using the same discovery process used above—physical, aural, visual.
- **Label concept of whole/step**
- **Sing:** *do* to *re*, whole step; *re* to *mi*, whole step; *mi* to *fa*, half step; *fa* to *sol*, whole step, etc.
- **Read:** A **major scale** from staff. Practice on hand staff first if necessary.



d

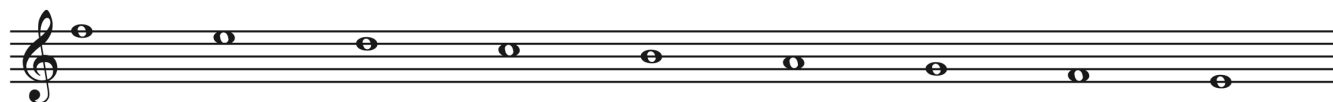
- Read harmony portion (voice 2) from octavo (mm. 7-15) in A major.
- **Read:** **B-flat major scale** from staff. Practice on hand staff first if necessary.



d

- Read harmony portions (alternating between voice 1 & 2) from octavo (mm. 19-26) in B-flat major.

- **Read: C major scale** from staff. Practice on hand staff first if necessary. Point out the meter changes ahead in this arrangement. Body percussion sections not performed on first read.



d

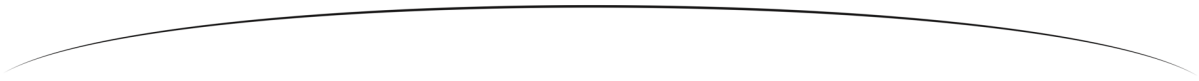
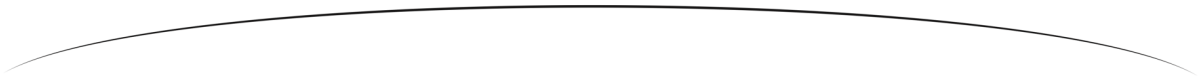
- Read harmony portions (alternating between voice 1 & 2) from octavo (mm. 36-49) in C major.
- **Read: D major scale** from staff. Practice on hand staff first if necessary.
- Read harmony portions (alternating between voice 1 & 2) from octavo (mm. 50-end) in D major (look ahead at altered tone on soprano, *fi* on m. 56).



d

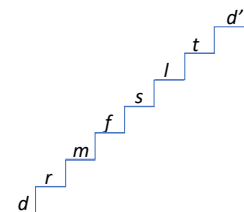
d

Blank score for stick notation, see next page.



Sons of Art (TB) – From *do* pentatonic to diatonic Major Scale

- After labeling the half steps in a pentatonic scale, a diatonic major scale will feel easier as it is ubiquitous in our culture. Warm up from the tone ladder.
- **Hand staff:** Place G on line 2 for tenors, all students practice treble clef placement. Place *do* on line 1 or space 4, all students practice bass clef placement.



• G Major tonization

Tenor

Baritone

d

d

Sons of Art Emily Crocker Score Reduction 1

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Tenor

Baritone

m

9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 *Fine*

T

B

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

T

B

m

Sons of Art
Emily Crocker
Score Reduction 2

The musical score is for two voices: Tenor (T) and Baritone (B). It is in the key of D major (one sharp) and common time. The score is divided into three systems. The first system contains measures 1 through 8. The second system contains measures 9 through 16, ending with a 'Fine' marking. The third system contains measures 18 through 25. The Tenor part is written on a treble clef staff, and the Baritone part is written on a bass clef staff. The melody consists of a series of eighth and quarter notes, with some measures containing rests. The score is a reduction, focusing on the melodic lines.

- Read octavo in solfege. Point out rhythmic challenges ahead. **When ready**, add text, with much care to unified vowels and diction.

Bashana Haba'ah (SAB) – From *la, pentatonic* to the minor scales

- In the case of minor songs, it can work to teach the concept of low *la*, in an isolated way using a *la, pentatonic* folk song first, which is more common in African American culture, but not as common in homes of other cultures (students not frequently exposed to low *la*, often confuse low *l*, with low *s*).
- Follow the same discovery path of tone discovery – physical, aural, visual.
 - Read from stick notation score of folk song.

C-line Woman

♩ = 108

Traditional Afro-American

m r d. l, s,

2/4

m m r r l, d

3

m m r r l, d

5

m m r r r l, d

l, l, d d l, s, l,

1.C-line woman, Cela,
She drink coffee, Cela,
She drink tea, Cela,
In the can-dle light, Cela.

2.Way down yonder, Cela,
On the log, Cela
And the rooster crowed, Cela,
In the candlelight, Cela.

- Practice putting tones on hand staff first, then transfer to regular staff.

l, l,

l, l,

Bashana Haba'ah
Tonization, a melodic minor

half-step half-step

Soprano

Alto

Baritone

l, f fi s si

l, f fi s si

S

A

B

l

Detailed description: This musical score is for a piece titled 'Bashana Haba'ah' with the subtitle 'Tonization, a melodic minor'. It features four vocal staves. The first three staves are for Soprano, Alto, and Baritone, each with lyrics 'l, f fi s si' underneath. Above the Soprano staff, 'half-step' is written twice with arrows indicating the intervals between the notes 'fi' and 's', and between 's' and 'si'. The fourth staff is a three-part setting with parts labeled S, A, and B. The Soprano part (S) has lyrics 'l, f fi s si' and the Alto part (A) has lyrics 'l, f fi s si'. The Bass part (B) has lyrics 'l, f fi s si'. The score is written in common time (C) and uses a melodic minor scale.

Bashana Haba'ah
Score reduction 1, a melodic minor

Soprano

Alto

Baritone

S

A

B

Detailed description: This musical score is a 'Score reduction 1' of 'Bashana Haba'ah', with the subtitle 'a melodic minor'. It features four vocal staves. The first three staves are for Soprano, Alto, and Baritone. The fourth staff is a three-part setting with parts labeled S, A, and B. The score is written in common time (C) and uses a melodic minor scale.

Bashana Haba'ah
Score reduction 2, a minor

Soprano

Alto

Baritone

This system contains the first three staves of the score. The Soprano and Alto parts are written in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The Baritone part is written in bass clef. All three parts follow a similar melodic line, starting with a half note, followed by quarter notes, and ending with a half note and a quarter note. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

S

A

B

This system contains the next three staves of the score. The Soprano (S) and Alto (A) parts continue the melodic line. The Baritone (B) part continues the melodic line. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

S

A

B

This system contains the next three staves of the score. The Soprano (S) and Alto (A) parts continue the melodic line. The Baritone (B) part continues the melodic line. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

S

A

B

This system contains the final three staves of the score. The Soprano (S) and Alto (A) parts end with a half note and a quarter note. The Baritone (B) part ends with a half note and a quarter note. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

Bashana Haba'ah

Tonization, b-flat minor

half-step half-step

Soprano
Alto
Baritone

l, f fi s si

l, f fi s si

S
A
B

l

l

Bashana Haba'ah

Score reduction 1, b-flat minor

Soprano
Alto
Baritone

S
A
B

Bashana Haba'ah
Score reduction 2, b-flat minor

Soprano

Alto

Baritone

This block shows the first system of the musical score for Soprano, Alto, and Baritone voices. The key signature is B-flat minor (three flats) and the time signature is common time (C). The Soprano and Alto parts are written on treble clefs, and the Baritone part is on a bass clef. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with a key signature change to B-flat major (two flats) in the final measure of the system.

S

A

B

This block shows the second system of the musical score for Soprano, Alto, and Baritone voices. The notation continues with eighth and quarter notes, maintaining the key signature change to B-flat major.

S

A

B

This block shows the third system of the musical score for Soprano, Alto, and Baritone voices. The melody continues with eighth and quarter notes in B-flat major.

S

A

B

This block shows the fourth system of the musical score for Soprano, Alto, and Baritone voices. The system concludes with a double bar line. The Soprano and Alto parts end with a whole note, while the Baritone part also ends with a whole note.

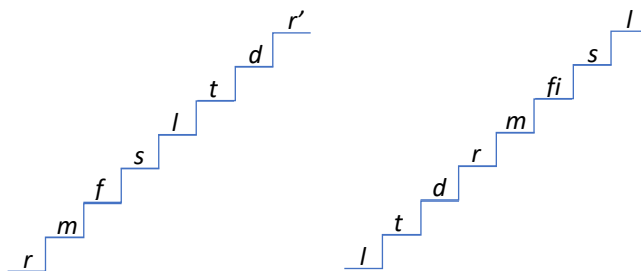
- Read score reduction 3, see handout
- Read octavo in solfege. Point out rhythmic challenges ahead. **When ready**, add text, with much care to unified vowels and diction.

Church Modes

- Renaissance a cappella music is a rich source of choral repertoire. Knowing the original church modes and their plagal versions is important for understanding this older repertoire not so familiar to our modern ears.
 - Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian.
 - Some folk songs have retained modal scales throughout the centuries.
- 20th & 21st century composers have looked back to these scales as tools of composition, often transposing them to modern keys, and at times using polymodality throughout a piece.
- Dorian – built on D of the natural scale (C), sounds “minor,” using sharp *fa* (*fi*), raised sixth.
- Phrygian – built on E of the natural scale (C), sounds “minor,” using flat *ti* (*ta*), lowered second.
- Lydian – built on F of the natural scale (C), sounds “major,” using *fi*, raised fourth.
- Mixolydian – built on G of the natural scale (C), sounds “major” (using flat *ti* (*ta*), lowered seventh).
 - Dorian & Lydian use the same altered solfege tone, akin to modern parallel major-minor scales.
 - Phrygian and Mixolydian use the same altered solfege tone, akin to modern parallel major-minor scales.
- Once students have learned the melodic minor scale, they will have been introduced to *fi*.

Scarborough Fair (SSA) – From minor scales to modal scales: Dorian

- Sing *re-re*’ for Dorian mode on tone ladder, transfer to *la*, -based mode with raised *fa* (*fi*).



Scarborough Fair Tonization, E Dorian

Scarborough Fair Score reductions 1 & 2, E Dorian (See handouts)

- Read octavo in solfege. Point out rhythmic challenges ahead. **When ready**, add text, with much care to unified vowels and diction.

Gloria by Orbán

- Modern composition is full of tonal and rhythmic challenges, with everchanging tone centers and meters.