

## Voices of the elderly

When singers begin to lose their physical shape and strength it is initially detectable in the vibrato. What is known as an 'old person's voice' or an 'old person's vibrato' is usually a sign that the singer is not applying enough support. The voice becomes unstable and frail and the vibrato grows larger.

Some people think the range of a voice changes with age so that higher notes actually disappear, but usually it is the physical strength that becomes insufficient. So it is very important for elderly singers to keep their strength, be in good physical shape and have a good technique.

As the years go by the singer will often feel that more support energy is required for the notes. If this energy is not provided, the vibrato increases and will be heard more clearly. If you keep in physical shape, however, there is nothing to prevent you from singing until you grow tired of it.

## Types of voices

In classical music and choral singing, voice types are often classified according to the following denominations:

- 'Soprano' is the light female voice
- 'Mezzo-soprano' or its abbreviation 'Mezzo' is the broader, darker female voice
- 'Alto' is the darkest female voice
- 'Tenor' is the light male voice
- 'Baritone' is the broader, darker male voice
- 'Bass' is the darkest male voice

## Different use of the denominations

In professional choir work it is important to group types of voices separately, as choral works are often composed with a strong emphasis on the composition of sound colours.

Knowledge of one's voice type is also essential for the classical soloist as convention often demands a particular type of voice for a given piece of music.

These denominations are not important to popular soloists. Types of voices are not classified categorically in popular music. In this music the individuality of singers is appreciated to

a greater degree. In fact, popular material is often sung by a completely different type of voice from the one it was originally written for in a conscious attempt to renew the song.

Outside the classical world the terms 'soprano', 'alto', 'tenor', and 'bass' are generally used for 'top voice' (soprano), 'middle voice' (alto and tenor), and 'low voice' (bass) respectively in choir work, regardless of which sound colour the voices have.

## Summary

- Before puberty boys and girls have similar small vocal cords, about 9.5 mm.
- During puberty boys' vocal cords grow about 10 mm, and thereby the pitch lowers by about an octave. During puberty girls' vocal cords grow on average around 4 mm, and the pitch lowers by only about 2-3 notes.
- The cords of grown women measure about 12 -17 mm and the cords of grown men measure about 17-24 mm, therefore men sing and speak a fifth or a sixth lower than women.
- It is important for elderly singers to be in good physical shape, keep their strength and have a good technique if they want to sing until they grow tired of it
- Types of voices (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) are used in the professional classical world for the various sound colours singers have. In the choir world and in the non-professional classical world they are used for how high and low in pitch the singer can sing.